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DETECTIVE Weekly

2D.



Gripping Complete Story of SEXTON BLAKE

The Mystery of SENOR 'Z'

By WARWICK JARDINE

FROM INFORMATION RECEIVED



A Summary of Police and Detective Gossip from all quarters.

Christmas Box.

THOSE of you who receive a box of chocolates among your Christmas presents this year may have a few optimistic ideas about what you will find inside, having read this little story. It concerns a certain young woman in Ottawa, who was delighted on Christmas Eve, a year or two ago, to receive a large and attractive box of chocolates from a certain admirer.

Thinking all sorts of nice things about the young man, she undid the beautifully tied blue ribbon and lifted the lid. But her previous thoughts about the "boy friend" were as nothing to the bewildered surprise that filled her when she saw what the box contained. For instead of rows of luscious chocolates, were neat bundles of dollar notes—868 dollars' worth!

Well, as a present, it seemed to be too good to be true. And so it was. Hastily the girl got in touch with her young man and asked him what was the catch. His astonishment was as great as hers—if not his disappointment—and he at once hurried round to the shop from which he had bought the box.

There he found the proprietor indulging in several sorts of panic. All his Christmas takings had vanished. He was ruined! And then the young man told his story, and the proprietor nearly fell, weeping, on his neck.

It appeared that there had been burglaries in the district, and because he had feared a visit from the "boys," the proprietor had decided on a brilliant method of hiding his money. No thief, he decided, would think of looking for his loot in one of the dozens of chocolate boxes which decorated his shelves, and so he had emptied a new box of its legitimate contents and replaced them with his dollars. Then he had put the box back on the shelf with the rest of his stock. Unfortunately, during the rush of business the following day, he had forgotten which box he had converted, and had sold it without thinking what he was doing. By the time he had discovered his dreadful mistake there seemed little chance of ever tracing it. But, fortunately, the buyer was an honest man, and the delighted confectioner repaid that honesty with the biggest box of chocolates he had in his shop. So the "girl friend" got her super-Christmas present after all—even if it wasn't exactly worth over 800 dollars. Another happy Christmas all round!

* * *

Fatted Calf.

IF a gold watch is found inside a calf when it is slaughtered for the meat market, to whom does it belong? That question has recently caused considerable excitement in a little town in Hungary, and at the time of going to press there are four claimants, all equally certain that the watch is really his.

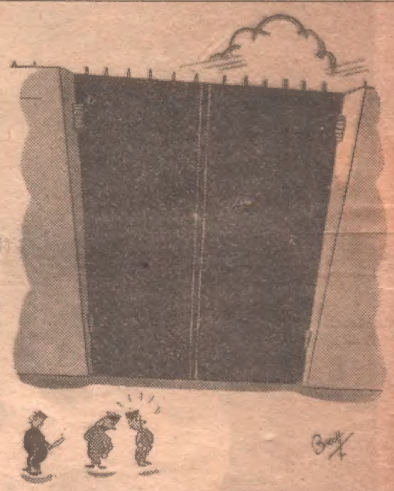
First of all, the man who found the watch, following the killing of the animal, declared that it was his, but immediately his right was disputed by the butcher who had sent the calf to be slaughtered. Then the farmer who had sold the calf to the butcher learned about the discovery, and announced that actually the watch was his, as he had sold the calf for its value as such, and had not included a gold watch in the deal. But just to make the argument really worth while, yet another claimant cropped up, who asserted that actually there could be no doubt but that the watch belonged to him. He was the owner of the pasture on which the calf had grazed, and his case was that the watch had been on his land when it had, presumably, been picked up and swallowed by the animal.

So far the matter rests there. But what about the individual who actually dropped the watch in the first place? Maybe, if he turns up, he'll be able to claim the calf. Seems fair enough in an argument of this kind.

* * *

By Request.

A GROCER at Grand Forks, North Dakota, provided a spot of humour in the local newspaper when he inserted a special notice for the attention of all burglars in the district. His shop had been broken into five times within five months without the culprits being caught, so he pleaded: "BURGLARS' ATTENTION. When robbing store this month, please use front door. We are tired of replacing windows.—Regards, HARRY'S GROCERY."



"While I keep him talking, you rush the gates."

* * *

Forgeries Fluctuate.

ACCORDING to Chief Frank J. Wilson, of the Secret Service H.Q. at Washington, the amount of counterfeiting varies considerably with the prevailing conditions. When trade is generally good, there is always less counterfeiting. An official of the chief's department said: "It has always happened that way. As far back as we can remember, counterfeiting has declined with business recovery and increased with depressions. It depends on the weather, too. If there is a long, hard winter, there is always an increase in counterfeiting." Why? No one seems to know.

* * *

Cracks from Court.

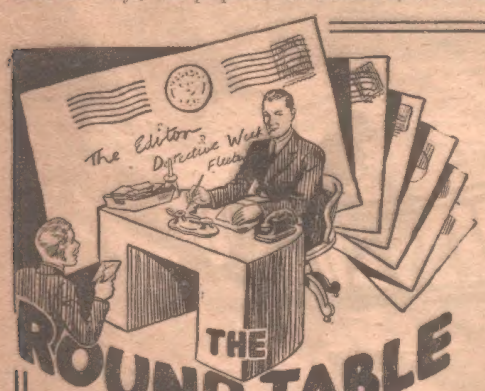
MAN at Tottenham Police Court: "My reply was in the negative; my wife's answer was in the superior."

Magistrate at Willesden: "Why did you leave your husband?"

Woman: "Because every time he gave me any money he adopted threatening attitudes with a bread-knife."

The Registrar: "Defendant says he is a bankrupt."

Witness for Plaintiff: "We have him down as a grocer."



Editor and Readers get together here to exchange views and opinions on everything of interest concerning "D.W." Write to: The Editor, Detective Weekly, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, LE.C.4.

THIS is a most important week for all of us, because it marks the very welcome return of that world-famous sleuth from Baker Street, Sexton Blake. I know positively that a very great many of you have patiently been waiting for this great event, and now I am more than glad to repay that patience. Furthermore, this is not just an isolated story of the great detective. From now on, indefinitely, there will be one of these special, extra long stories appearing every other week. Many old friends will be making their reappearance and, of course, you will meet many new ones. This pleasant surprise is by way of being my Christmas gift to you, and I shall be particularly grateful if you will all spread the news around that Sexton Blake is back in DETECTIVE WEEKLY. I am busy preparing all sorts of good things for our New Year's programme, and I am hoping for your co-operation in making 1938 a record year for our favourite paper.

But before the New Year, comes Christmas, and, of course, "D.W." must have its special Christmas story. Well, I have arranged for this to come to you next week, a hundred per cent, gripping, Christmas-mystery-thriller specially written by Edwy Searles Brooks. Yes, there's a haunted castle, a cheery party, a sinister "death room"—and murder! But that does not mean that it is like any other Christmas mystery story. You can bet Mr. Brooks wouldn't fall into that trap. "The Fantastic Affair at Cloon Castle" is full of surprises—and a twist that'll keep you on your toes till the very end. Here's a real Christmas treat that none of you must miss. And by the way, there will also be a new Don Smith story in this issue.

No doubt, many of you will be disappointed that Ex-Det. Inspector Brust is discontinuing his Crime Queries feature, but I am confident you will find his new series of articles more than sufficient compensation. He is going to take you right into Scotland Yard and show you just how this greatest of all police organisations really functions when it gets its nose on to a big case. A £20,000 smash and grab raid on a Piccadilly jewellers is the case chosen. Look out for Part 1 of this fascinating series next week!

Prizes this week go to Dennis Wimpenny, Linthwaite, near Huddersfield (fountain-pen), F. J. Stringer, Cradley Heath, Staffs (knife), G. Robinson, near Stourbridge (notecase), and a special prize to Goh Heng Chuan, Malacca, Straits Settlement.

Till next week—

YOUR EDITOR.

The Mystery of SENOR 'Z'



Across the girl's shoulder Tallon saw a twisted figure on the bed, and was suddenly tense. Murder was abroad at Skarr Hall.

By
WARWICK JARDINE

SEXTON BLAKE Investigates . . .

the strange riddles of death at Skarr Hall, and the man with the stolen mind . . . An extra-long complete story of thrills and gripping detective - work in England and South America.

Out of the Night.

A CAR'S headlamps, dimmed by the lashing rain, had appeared on the cliff road—two blurred, yellow eyes racing through the dark.

All sound of the powerful engines drowned by the shriek of the gale, like a ghost car it came snaking along the storm-swept zigzag road within a yard or two of the sheer four hundred foot drop to the Atlantic breakers smashing on the rocks below; a long-bonneted black Sunbeam, driven by a man with iron nerves.

At the point where the rough roadway dropped in a steep, tortuous curve over the edge of the gulf to a narrow bridge, the glimmering headlamps slowed, drew to a standstill on the wind-swept brink.

The driver stepped out on to the road—a man in the mid-thirties, lean-limbed, muscular, with a truculent jaw and pale, savage eyes flickering in the shadow of a low-drawn black felt hat, hands thrust deep in the pockets of a long overcoat.

He raised a pair of night-glasses that he had taken from his pocket, and focused them upon the stretch of cliffs at the far side of the gorge.

The vague outline of a house, perched on the cliff-edge half a mile away, appeared in the lenses: a house whose sole approach was by way of the bridge which spanned the gorge, in this wild and desolate corner of the great Cornish cliffs. For a while he stood watching, then slipped the glasses back into his pocket and turned to the car.

The black Sunbeam leapt forward and vanished over the brink, following the road that clung to the face of the cliff. A minute later the glimmering headlamps appeared on the bridge below.

The full force of the Atlantic gale was howling through the gorge, almost threatening—so it seemed—to tear away the frail stone arch that spanned it. Beneath the bridge, the maelstrom of crashing waters roared and hissed, as the driver of the black Sunbeam halted the car midway across and jumped out.

For a minute or more he busied himself at some task in the centre of the bridge. Then once more the headlamps slid on through the darkness, climbing steeply out of the gorge at the farther side.

Two minutes later a sheet of flame burst like a giant bubble in the windswept dark, the roar of the explosion drowned by the storm.

The moon shone out palely through a gap in the clouds.

The bridge had been plunged in broken ruin into the echoing darkness, with nothing but a few jutting fragments of torn stonework at either side of the gulf to show where it had once been.

The destroyer, staring down from the farther brink, smiled. It was not a pretty smile. He turned away; and with noiseless engines the black Sunbeam went on through the storm towards the lonely house—the house now cut off so utterly from the outer world.

A big stone gateway appeared presently through the murk, the name of the house beyond carved deep in the flanking pillars—Skarr Hall. The blurred headlights lit up the avenue of twisted fir-trees beyond as the rain-lashed car drove in through the open gates.

. . . . . .

"I want to see your master!"

A young footman had opened the door in answer to the unexpected knocking. He gazed out in astonishment at the shadowy figure standing at the top of the steps in the gloom of the porch. On

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nights such as this casual visitors at the old house were decidedly few and far between.

"What name, sir?"

There was something in the pale, granite-blue eyes of the man in the long wet overcoat that held those of the footman compellingly.

The stranger stepped into the hall.

"Give him my card."

Engraved upon the visiting card that the footman bore obediently away on a silver salver was the name "Mr. John Maitland."

Left alone, the stranger glanced about him. The hall was lofty and spacious, its style medieval, the stone floor strewn with luxurious rugs. A number of gleaming suits of armour stood against the walls, with big shadowy oil-paintings hung above them. The heavy old doors that opened from the hall were set in ancient stone arches, and the windows were ornamented with armorial bearings in stained glass. A log fire was burning.

"Mr.—er—Maitland?"

The stranger swung round. He had not heard the approach of the man who suddenly addressed him from an archway on the left of the hall—a man whose six-foot figure was heavy with flesh, but who moved with an almost uncanny lightness.

He was clad in a dinner jacket, his broad, clean-shaven face blandly expressionless. An eyeglass was jammed in front of one of the rather blank eyes.

"Mr.—er—Maitland?" he repeated. His voice was as calmly expressionless as his face. "I do not think I have the pleasure of your acquaintance?"

"No," agreed the man whose name was, seemingly, Maitland. "The fact is, I have been driven to seek shelter here. The bridge across the gorge has gone to blazes—torn down by the storm. I missed my road, trying to get to Melmouth, found I had struck a dead-end up here—and when I tried to get back, the bridge had gone. Lucky I wasn't on it when it went——"

"The deuce!" ejaculated the other in the same calm voice. "I never dreamt the bridge could fall. I shall make trouble over this. I might have been on it myself at the time!" With a wave of his hand he seemed to dismiss the subject. The startling information brought by the stranger had left this bland, blank-featured man completely unruffled. "You will have to spend the night here."

"You are very kind. I had intended asking the loan of a blanket or two, so that I could sleep in my car without freezing—it's colder than charity out there! But——"

"My dear fellow, I can give you a bed! My name, by the way, is Glass." He turned to the young footman hovering at the back of the hall. "Take Mr. Maitland's coat and hat. A room must be prepared for him—the grey room. And tell Chalmers to garage Mr. Maitland's car. You are just in time for dinner, Mr. Maitland."

The heavy figure turned and conducted his visitor across the hall, with his peculiar noiseless strut. The man from the storm followed with flickering eyes.

Three men were gathered in a small group by the fireplace in the large, softly lit library to which he was led. They turned at the others' entry.

One of them was considerably younger than his companions—a sleek young man with a short black moustache and a supercilious expression on his undeniably handsome face, his evening clothes smoothly immaculate, his black hair heavily oiled.

Of the other two, one was a tall, aquiline-featured man of middle-age, with dark, watchful eyes, whose sallow skin was more than a little foreign in appearance, and whose long, tapering hands might have been equally those of a musician or of a safe-lock expert. Beside him stood a burly, fair-haired figure, also in evening clothes, whose square head and duel-scarred face seemed to proclaim the German. His name, it appeared, was, nevertheless, English—Peterson.

The sallow-faced man of the same age, with the dark eyes and hawk nose, was introduced as Mr. Torres. The name was Spanish. The young man with the supercilious face and pomaded hair was Leo Glass—"My son, Mr. Maitland," explained the monocled owner of Skarr Hall.

He turned his blank eyes upon the three and blandly explained the situation.

The gale seemed to be increasing, battering on the long windows with almost hurricane force.

"There is, at least, plenty of food in the house, gentlemen," murmured Glass, adjusting his monocle with a large, soft, white hand. "It may be several days before we can get away from here, of course." He laughed rather foolishly. "Quite an adventure, what?"

Glass turned to his unexpected visitor.

"Mr. Peterson and Mr. Torres are visiting me for the week-end," he explained. "In this lonely spot my son and I are most grateful for the visits of our friends! It appears that in the present circumstances their week-end will be considerably extended!" He gave another laugh. "Eh? Eh, Peterson? Eh, Torres? Ha, ha! We shall all be grateful for your added company, Mr. Maitland. Dinner will be ready soon—no doubt you would like to go to your room? If you will follow me——"

The heavy figure strutted softly from the room with the new guest. Leo Glass, Torres, and Peterson stood watching in a silent group until the door closed.

"I suppose he's all right—this feller Maitland?" muttered Leo Glass uneasily.

"Oh, sure!" growled Peterson. The five neatly arranged scars of his German University days—one on the square chin, two on each cheek—showed white in the firelight. "Anyway, let's have a look at this Quichua bowl——"

"All right." Leo Glass turned languidly to a small safe set in the wall between two of the high bookcases. He dialled the necessary combination.

"What's it worth?" demanded Peterson.

The Argentine shrugged.

"Perhaps a hundred and fifty thousand pesos."

"What's that in real money?" growled Peterson.

"About four thousand pounds in English money, at the present rate of exchange."

"Siegfried thought three thousand," Peterson cut in. Siegfried Glass was the name of their host.

"I think it is worth more," insisted Torres.

"Let's hope you're right!" yawned Leo Glass.

Upstairs, Siegfried was ushering the new, unexpected arrival at Skarr Hall into a small but well-furnished bed-room—a rather solitary room at the back of the east wing, overlooking the cliffs.

"I trust you will be comfortable here, my dear fellow."

The man with the pale eyes did not answer.

He was looking past his host at a slim figure that was laying out towels on the rack by the dressing-table. A graceful girl, a little above average woman's height, with glorious red-gold hair and dark violet eyes, in the uniform of a maidservant. She turned quickly at the sound of her employer's voice, and her eyes met those of the stranger.

For a moment she stood riveted. A wondering, startled light had flashed into her violet eyes. Her lips opened soundlessly.

"You!"

The unspoken ejaculation was plain enough, for a split second only, in the dismayed eyes of the girl in uniform.

Quickly she glanced away, completed her task, and walked from the room.

"Dinner will be ready in ten minutes, Mr. Maitland." It was evident that the man with the monocle had noticed nothing. "You will find everything here that you may need, I trust, my dear fellow."

"Thanks a lot." For a moment the stranger had been as startled by the sight of the girl as she had been at sight of him; but already he had recovered his poise. Once more he was cool and laconic. "I seem to have struck lucky."

"Nonsense, my dear chap! Only too glad to take you in, of course! Couldn't leave you out in the storm, eh? If you want me, my room is in the other wing."

With a wave of a large white hand, Siegfried Glass went soft-footedly from the room.

Continuing—

The Amazing Adventures of HAIRBREADTH HARRY,



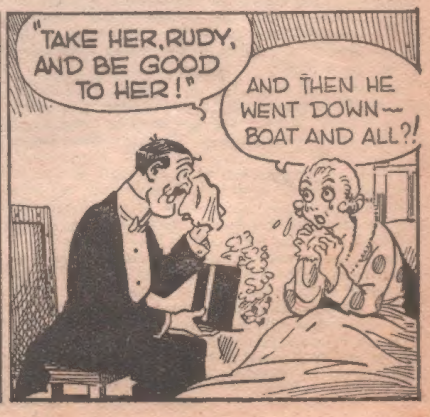
his beauteous Belinda Blinks, and the rascally Rudolph Rassendale.

His hated rival, Harry, gone to a watery doom somewhere in mid-Atlantic, Rudolph, triumphant, thinks he's a cert for Belinda's heart and hand. Here's his big moment. Will broken-hearted Belinda fall for that phoney story he's pitching her, or——









The stranger stood staring at the closed door with an odd smile.

He took out a cigarette and lit it, frowning. His thoughts had turned to the girl with the violet eyes—the maidservant.

"What the devil!" he asked himself. She was one of the last people in the world he would have expected to find at this lonely, storm-swept house on the Cornish cliffs.

He glanced up sharply. A faint tap had come on the door. He strode towards it and pulled it open. Framed in the doorway stood the lovely figure of which he had been thinking.

For a few seconds they surveyed one another in silence. There was a challenge in the eyes of the girl.

"Well?" It was the man who spoke first, in a tone of rather grim humour. "How's things, Sonia?"

She shrugged graceful shoulders and smiled coolly.

"So Mr. Maitland is—Dcarth Tallon!" Her tone was faintly mocking.

"Is it an impertinence to ask what your little game is, Sonia?" asked Dearth Tallon, with a dry grin. "This maidservant game——"

Again she shrugged.

"Need you ask? I suppose we are both here for the same thing. I had to get into the house—so I took a maid's job! Do we join forces, or is it to be a straight fight between us?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," he said harshly. "I don't understand why you are here—nor you why I am here——"

His words snapped off. A distant footstep had come to the ears of both from the direction of the head of the stairs. The girl glanced hurriedly along the corridor, and moved quickly away. Tallon closed the door silently. He stood frowning, drawing at his cigarette, with shadowed eyes.

. . . . . .

The talk during dinner that night told Tallon little of his companions—the four men marooned with him in this big old house on the edge of the Atlantic cliffs—other than the fact of Torres' Argentine nationality, and that Siegfried Glass and Peterson had both been to the Argentine at one time or another. Presently he began to be interested in Leo Glass. It struck Tallon that despite his cool, supercilious exterior, Siegfried Glass' son was labouring under the stress of a carefully concealed uneasiness—a nervous excitement that was now and then betrayed by the twitch of a finger or an inane laugh, the sudden upsetting of his glass of wine.

The meal was over now. Siegfried Glass rose to his feet, lifting his glass of port wine and glancing at his three guests.

"There can be no doubt that we are marooned here together for several days at least," he murmured silkily. "Not until the sea grows calm shall we be able to make use of boats. Let us drink to a pleasant time together—eh, gentlemen?" He gave his rather foolish laugh.

Dearth Tallon, Torres and Peterson, and Leo Glass raised their glasses to their lips. The shriek of the storm raging round the old house with hurricane force, battering at doors and windows, filled the room with queer, echoing whispers.

The toast was duly drunk—for one of the five the last toast he would drink on earth.

. . . . . .

The rain had stopped, but the gale was still thundering over the cliffs, the great waves smashing on the rocks below, as Dearth Tallon stepped from his room into the darkness of the corridor—stood listening, a lean, wolfish figure in the gloom, fully dressed, with a gun in his pocket.

From somewhere in the depths of the old house a clock chimed faintly. Two hours after midnight. No other sound but the wind.

On noiseless feet he strode towards the head of the stairs, past the stairs, and on towards the farther wing, where slept Siegfried Glass. He had found out during the course of the evening just where that room was.

He turned from one corridor into another.

The door of Siegfried Glass' room was standing open. But the room itself was in utter darkness.

In a moment or two he stole on towards it. An arched alcove faced the open door at the end of the passage, and it was from the alcove that a faint whisper of sound came to his ears when he was within a yard or two. He stiffened. The next instant he had sent the white beam of an electric torch raking into the darkness of the alcove, his other hand on the butt of the gun in his pocket.

A white face stared back at him, the eyes blinded for the moment by the vivid glare of the torchlight. He drew a hissing breath between his teeth.

"Sonia!" he breathed.

He snapped out the torch.

"What are you doing here?" he whispered harshly.

The girl did not answer.

She stepped through the open door opposite. Tallon followed her into the room and flashed on the light. The girl stood silently between him and a big four-poster bed.

And then Tallon saw what lay there.

The bedclothes were dragged back from a sprawled pyjama-clad figure—Siegfried Glass, hideous grinning terror frozen in the fleshy face, a long stiletto in his heart.

The Theatre Crime.

Mr. Walter H. Laug.
199, W. 44th St.,
New York City. N.Y.

SEXTON BLAKE read the printed card with casual interest. It had been lying on his desk when he had returned to his house in Baker Street that evening. He tossed the visiting-card back on to the desk, and stood filling his pipe as he glanced across at Tinker.

Tinker, Blake's asistant, was filing away newspaper cuttings. He had not been with Blake during the day.

"Who's this fellow Lang?" inquired Blake.

"Lang? Oh, of course! I meant to tell you. He called three times while you were out, hoping you'd be back. He's an American—a Yank private inquiry agent, so he says. Wouldn't tell me his business, though. Had to see you personally. I told him to come round to-morrow morning, and he said he'd be along at nine-thirty."

"H'm!" Blake dropped into a chair, drawing at his lighted pipe. "What about a show to-night, Tinker? I need relaxation."

"There's a good show on at the Milanese, if you feel like a musical comedy."

"Right! Telephone for a couple of stalls."

They got centre gangway seats in the third row of the stalls. Soon after taking their places, the curtain rose, to a burst of music.

It was a three-act show. During the first interval Blake and Tinker strolled out into one of the lounges to smoke a cigarette. It was some minutes later, when they were thinking of returning to their seats, that Tinker felt a hand touch him on the arm.

"Well, fancy findin' you here!"

It was the American who had called at Baker Street so insistently that day during the absence of Sexton Blake—the New York inquiry agent, Walter Lang.

Already the American's eyes were fastened upon Sexton Blake.

"I guess you are Mr. Blake?"

"I am." The two men shook hands. "I understand you have been anxious to see me, Mr. Lang?"

The warning bell, indicating that the curtain was about to rise, whirred noisily in the lounge.

"I am," agreed the New Yorker grimly. "But I don't want to spoil your show now. Look here! What about meetin' here in the next interval, just for a word or two? How's that, Mr. Blake?"

"Certainly."

The American detective threw away the stub of his rather evil-smelling cigar, and the three moved out into the auditorium. Lang was sitting some rows behind Blake and Tinker, on the other side. He nodded to them, and made his way towards his own seat.

At the end of the second act the three met as arranged in the crowded bar.

"It's an honour to meet you, sir," the American greeted Blake, with a bronzed smile. "I'm in the same line of thing as yourself over the other side; but I don't claim to size with you. I'm over here on a job of work now—you guessed that, of course. A big job, Mr. Blake. The biggest thing I've ever handled."

He pulled out a cigar-case. Blake and Tinker both declined it. But the American detective lit up with every evidence of enjoyment.

"It started in New York City," he went on. "And then it took me down to Buenos Aires. Ever been in the Argentine, Mr. Blake? Yeah, I thought you would have. From Buenos Aires this little-old job has brought me here to London. So you can see it's big——"

He thrust a hand into his breast-pocket, and produced a roll of notes, handing them to Blake.

"What do you think of these?"

Blake unrolled the notes, and saw that they were of various national currencies. There was an American five-hundred dollar bill, a French five-thousand franc note, an English banknote for a hundred pounds, and others—Argentine, Spanish, Italian.

Blake examined them closely.

"What do you think of 'em?" queried Lang.

"The Bank of England note is a fake," said Blake. "So is the American. I should incline to think that the Spanish note is also 'slush,' even without considering the company it is in. As it is, I suppose they are all of 'em wrong?"

"They sure are. Every one of those bills is phoney, Mr. Blake. I guess it's all mighty clever stuff, though——"

"Clever? It's phenomenal!" Blake again examined the fake hundred-pound Bank of England note. "Never seen anything one-half as good, and I've seen some pretty good 'slush' in my time."

The American returned the fake notes to his pocket.

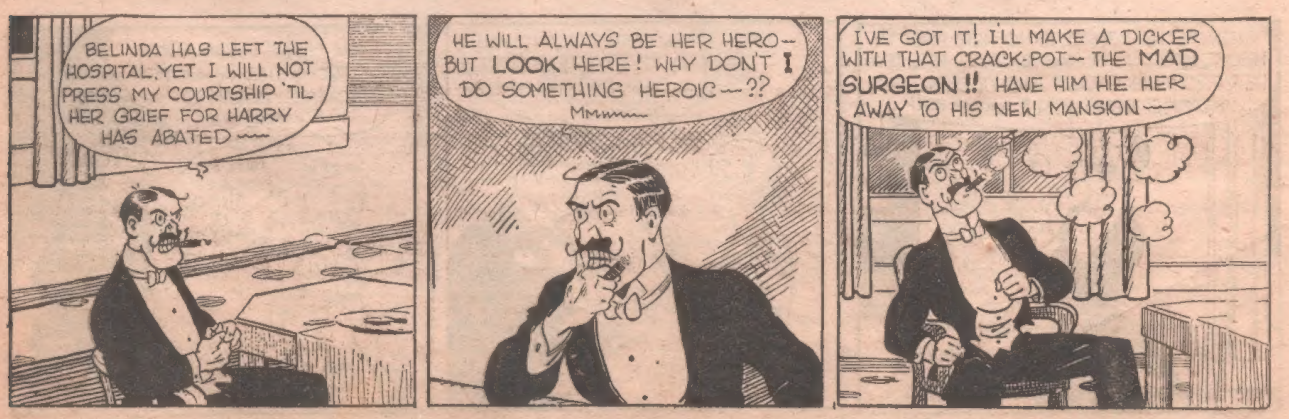
"Who turns those out?" asked Tinker curiously.

"I don't know," answered the American. He had set his glass down on a small table when lighting his cigar; now he picked it up again. "Tell me, Mr. Blake, have you ever heard of a guy named Siegfried Glass?"

He flicked the ash from his cigar, and raised his drink to his lips; then paused.

"Siegfried Glass," he went on, "lives at a place called Skarr Hall, near Melmouth, in Cornwall. I've got a hunch——"

He took a drink.



For a second the man from New York stood staring at Sexton Blake. In that moment every drop of blood seemed to sweep from his head, leaving the bronzed face grey-brown. The slender glass fell from his loosened fingers and crashed between his feet. He swayed, open-mouthed, and toppled forward into Blake's arms.

There were quick, startled ejaculations from one or two other men in the bar who had seen him collapse.

"Fellow ill——"

Blake lowered the tall, sprawling figure to the floor. His face was set as he glanced up.

"Poison," he said quietly. "Cyanide of potassium, I fancy. It kills instantly."

His inquiries at the theatre brought nothing to light. The unknown killer had struck and vanished without trace.

. . . . . .

"Poor devil!" muttered Sexton Blake. He and Tinker were back at Baker Street. "He said he was on a big job—the biggest thing he had ever handled. It was too big for him in the end. It was the hunter hunted at the finish, though he didn't know it. They were after him. It's probable he was followed from Buenos Aires——"

He paced the carpet restlessly, the long dressing-gown that he had slipped on swaying against his long-striding legs, a cloud of tobacco smoke drifting round his head.

Suddenly he halted.

"Tinker, we're going to pick up the trail where Lang left off. I feel we owe it to him. We don't know yet who he was up against, or why—but, by Heaven, we'll find it out!"

He crossed to the window and drew back the curtain, staring out at the night sky. Racing clouds obscured the moon, and a stormy wind was beating up Baker Street, flinging rain-flurries against the window-panes.

"Looks like being a dirty kind of a day to-morrow, Tinker. Not the best sort of weather for a three-hundred mile drive. But that's what we're taking——"

"You mean to Cornwall?"

Blake nodded grimly.

"I want to take a look at this place Lang spoke of—Skarr Hall, and learn a few things about Mr. Siegfried Glass."

Flight.

DEARTH TALLON, gazing down at the dead body of Siegfried Glass in the big room overlooking the gale-swept Atlantic, smiled. It was a smile utterly without mirth.

He thrust his gun into his pocket, and approached the bed, the torchlight piercing the darkness like a staring eye.

A newspaper was lying on the table by the bed, the country edition of a London morning paper. The Stop Press column was folded uppermost and its heavy headlines stood out black on the white paper:

"MAN POISONED IN LONDON THEATRE!"

Tallon was uninterested; but it struck him as grimly ironical that in all probability the account of the man murdered the previous night at the Milanese—he had read the account himself earlier that day—had been the last thing that Siegfried Glass had read before his own ghastly finish. He put out the light.

Then, taking the girl by her arm, he strode from the room, closing the door behind them.

"Well," muttered Tallon, "do you know anything about that?" He gestured towards the closed door.

She shook her head.

"Nothing," she whispered huskily. "I just found him lying there——" She broke off with a sudden shudder.

"You saw nobody?"

"No one."

"But he's not been dead long," he told her grimly. "What brought you here, Sonia?"

"I wanted to take the key of the safe in the library," she answered coolly. "You know why—that's why you are here yourself."

"You've got things wrong," he muttered, with an impatient gesture. "It wasn't any key that brought me to Glass' room to-night." In his voice there was a note of hard savagery. "I tell you——"

His words snapped off.

A footstep had sounded along the passage. The next moment the passage was bathed brightly in electric light.

The girl swung round with a sharp cry. Tallon, staring along the passage with baleful eyes, saw the figure of Leo Glass, in a silk dressing-gown, standing with his hand on the electric light switch, peering towards them with astonished face.

"What the deuce!"

Leo Glass came slowly forward.

"I thought I heard somethin'——" he went on, and broke off, glancing from one to another with evident suspicion. "Nothin' wrong, is there, Maitland?" he said sharply. "And what are you doing here, Marie?"

Sonia March did not speak. Tallon stepped towards Leo, and something in his eyes caused the son of Siegfried Glass to recoil swiftly.

He whipped out a hand from his dressing-gown pocket, and Tallon saw that he was being covered by a snub-nosed automatic.

"Keep back!" muttered Leo hoarsely. He was suddenly trembling, and his voice was shaken with excitement. "Keep back, I tell you! I want to know what the game is! I never did like the look of you, Maitland! You're a crook—that's my idea of it! And this girl—she's probably your accomplice! What are you both doing here outside my father's door?"

His voice quivered excitedly, his face was strangely white.

And then Tallon leapt. The weapon in Leo's hand blazed, the report echoing deafeningly in the confined space of the passage. A pencil of flame stabbed between them, but already Tallon's hand had closed upon the wrist that held the gun, and the bullet smashed into the plaster above their heads.

His right hand got Leo's throat. He swung him to the wall, and pinned him there, and now Leo's automatic was in Tallon's hand.

"Clear!" he snarled to the girl behind him. "Down the stairs—the front door! I'll follow!"

He released his grip of the sleek young man in the silk dressing-gown, and Leo Glass sagged weakly against the wall, panting. Tallon turned and raced to the stairs after the girl

As he went down them he heard a shout from behind. Glancing round, he saw the square, fair head of Peterson staring down over the banisters from the top of the staircase. Running footsteps could be heard from the direction of the servants' wing.

The front door was standing open as he reached the dark hall. He could see the starlight outside, and the shadowy figure of the girl waiting on the steps. He heard the echoing report of an automatic, and there was a searing pain in his left arm. Peterson, then, had an automatic, too.

He staggered for a moment as the bullet struck; then he was through the open door, and the girl had dragged it shut.

"The garage!" he rasped fiercely.

"But the bridge!" she cried.

"Never mind the bridge—we want that car, I tell you!"

They were racing down the steps. She did not protest further, but led the way.

"You'll have to drive!" he grated. "My arm's no use——"

His companion slipped lithely into the driving-seat. The first touch on the self-starter set the engine roaring. The long black car swung out over the flagstones, leapt through the archway and towards the drive.

"Where are we going?" The girl beside him flung the question as she swung the car out through the gates towards the gorge. "We can't get away with the bridge gone."

"That's what they're saying," grinned Tallon. "And that's where they're wrong! There's a bridge all right farther along. A bridge of sorts, anyway."

She asked no further question. They raced along the high cliff road without headlights, the gale howling in from the sea across their path. There was still no sign of pursuit, though there was a car and chauffeur at Skarr Hall.

"They think we're trapped," grinned Tallon sourly.

They came to the edge of the gorge and jumped out on to the road Peering down, they could see the ruined ends of the broken bridge dim in the starlight, the whole of the centre ripped out of it.

"This car's going over!" jerked out Tallon. "We can't take it across with us—and we can't leave it here. Might be traced, though they're duff number plates. Besides, with luck the county police will think we've gone over with it!"

He released the handbrake of the stationary car, put his shoulder to the body, and it moved forward, gathering speed as it took the slope and plunged over.

"Pretty tough on a good car," he said with a hard laugh. "Come on."

He led the way along the edge of the gorge.

Four hundred yards ahead, at the narrowest point, the opposite brinks of the abyss were comparatively close, and some distance beneath the two jutting rocks from the sides of the gorge were no more than a dozen yards apart. The girl saw that a slender rope-bridge joined the two rocks.

"Think you can make it?" he asked her, and she nodded. "It's safe. Flack rigged it up last night."

Again she nodded. She knew who Flack was—Dearth Tallon's wiry little Cockney valet, chauffeur, and general factotum; the leather-faced man with rattlesnake eyes who served his crook master with a blind loyalty that never failed.

She followed him down the sloping side of the gorge, scrambling easily after the lean figure of her leader. They made the passage of the swaying bridge without difficulty, and Tallon cast off the ropes. It fell dangling from the opposite rock

"Follow me," he ordered.

Half a mile from the gorge, in a grassy hollow, a stone shepherd's hut loomed up before them. A catlike figure in a leather coat was smoking a cigarette in the black shadow of one of the walls, and Sonia saw that it was Flack.

"Here I am, son!" muttered Tallon—though Flack, who was uncertain age, was older than he, it was Tallon's habit to address his man as "son." "Everything O.K.?"

"Yeah, captain," muttered Flack huskily.

"Where's the car?"

"Two minutes away, sir." Flack was eyeing Sonia March. Already he had recognised her—and that his master's unexpected companion should be Sonia March was bewildering to him.

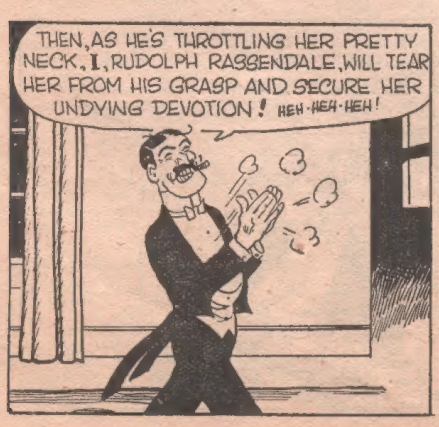
He remembered her well—had good cause to remember her! Some time previously Sonia March's affairs became temporarily entwined with those of Tallon in a grim business that none of the three was likely to forget. But neither Flack nor Tallon had ever expected to see Sonia March again.

"Hallo, Flack!" said the girl coolly

"'Evening, miss," grunted Flack huskily.

"Get the car along on to the road over there," said Tallon, nodding towards a rutted, wind-swept track that passed within a few hundred yards of the hut, and Flack vanished silently over the downs.

Tallon took out a cigarette-case. The girl lit a







cigarette, and he followed suit. He stood surveying her with a flickering smile.

He was still utterly mystified at finding her at Skarr Hall.

"What's the game, Sonia?" he asked abruptly.

"What is *your* game?" she countered. "What brought you to that house?"

For a moment or two he did not answer. A hard, savage glitter had entered his pale eyes as he stared back at her through the gloom.

"My game?" he said at last, his voice harsh and bitter. "I'll tell you——"

And as she listened the girl's eyes took on a startled gleam. Tallon laughed grimly as he finished—a dangerous laugh for someone.

"I see," she whispered slowly. "I see!"

"Well—and you?"

She laughed bitterly.

"I just went there to—steal!"

"To steal?" he echoed wonderingly. "What in blazes—you're not a common thief, Sonia."

She shrugged.

"Glass was crazy about South American relics—collected them. Some time ago he bought a gold Quichua bowl from an old antique dealer I know who was ignorant of its value. Glass knew it was worth several thousand—and paid fifty pounds for it. Cheated him! The man he bought it from is terribly poor, and I decided to get it back for him if I could. That's all."

"I see," muttered Tallon, frowning. "A dangerous game, Sonia!" He smiled a quarter inch smile. "And you didn't get it."

"Oh, yes, I did!"

From beneath her coat she produced the Quichua bowl.

"I had Glass' keys," she went on coolly. "I had taken them from the table by his bed before I saw that he was—murdered. I hadn't taken all the risk for nothing, so I ran into the library when I got downstairs as we were coming from the house, and it didn't take a moment to collect this. I shall sell it in Paris or Brussels," she went on coolly, "for its real value, and send the money anonymously to the man it belonged to—minus my commission. I've no money, and I have to live somehow."

Tallon drew a deep breath

"Let's have a look at it."

Tallon took the glimmering object from her. It was astonishingly heavy—solid gold. Peering down at it in the starlight, he gave a sudden muttered ejaculation

"I suppose Glass showed this to his guests—Torres and Peterson?" he asked swiftly.

"I don't know. I expect so."

A savage grin appeared on Tallon's lips.

"Sonia you've done me the best turn in the world to-night! I'll pay you your price for this myself."

"I don't understand!" she breathed. "Why?"

"Never mind why!" he told her almost roughly. "Let's get moving."

Five minutes later he and Sonia March were seated in the back of a dark closed car with the hunched figure of Flack at the steering-wheel speeding along the cliff-road London-bound.

It was half a mile farther on, at a point where the road swung inland through a patch of dark twisted firs, that they slowed down abruptly. Tallon, peering ahead, saw the reason; another car was drawn up in the narrow road, partially blocking their way.

Two figures were standing in the road, lit by the vivid glare of the headlamps. They were watching a third man changing the wheel of a car, and they stepped aside to make room for Tallon's.

With a swift movement, Dearth Tallon snapped out the light in the interior of the big saloon, as Flack squeezed it slowly past the stationary car. Sonia March, staring out as they passed, saw one of the men on the road—a tall figure in a long, heavy overcoat with a pipe between his teeth—glance up at them as they crawled by. Then they were past, and once more Flack squeezed down his foot on the accelerator. They leapt away along the wind-swept road through the shadowy starlight.

"See who those birds were?"

Something in Tallon's voice caused the girl to turn her face swiftly.

"Who?" she breathed.

"Sexton Blake!" said Tallon slowly. "Sexton Blake—and Detective-inspector Coutts, of Scotland Yard. Blake, of all men! The third must have been his assistant."



The Man Who Vanished.

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR COUTTS stepped through the doorway of the room where Siegfried Glass had died and stood staring round, with a look of keen interest on his bulldog face.

Sexton Blake was already standing in the centre of the room, and Inspector Tawnish, of the county police, was entering in company with Tinker.

Who killed Siegfried Glass?

Blake, Coutts, and Tirker had been at the Melmouth police-station when Leo Glass' call had come. The discovery of the broken bridge, and that there was no other means of access to the old house on the cliffs beyond, had been the cause of their presence at that hour at the police-station; and they had lost no time in arranging for the erection of a temporary bridge across the gorge.

Its erection, however, had proved rather a slow business. And it had not been until the afternoon that it had been possible for them to get across.

By that time, thanks to the telephone wires, they already knew the outstanding facts of the case.

It had already been established that "Maitland's" car had crashed into the gorge, but as yet, however, it was impossible to go down in search of the bodies, and of the stolen bowl that was presumably still in the wrecked car.

"Well—here we are at last!" grunted Coutts, staring round the big room.

His eyes fastened on the big four-poster bed in which Siegfried Glass had been found dead, with his slayer's stiletto still deep in his heart. The blood-stained bed-clothes were still tumbled about as they had been at the time, though the body of the murdered man now lay in another room.

"That's the bed, eh?" muttered Coutts. "Well, I don't see that there's much for us to learn up here, anyway. It's obvious already who killed Glass. That fellow Maitland, and as soon as we can get his body out of the gorge—his body and the girl's——"

"I doubt if we shall ever do that," cut in Blake. And Coutts stared at him. So did Inspector Tawnish.

"What do you mean?"

"I doubt, strongly, if Maitland and the girl went over in that car." Blake drew smilingly at his pipe.

"Hasn't it occurred to you that since Maitland gained access to this house, thanks to the destruction of the bridge, it strikes one as being a little too much of a coincidence to believe that it was the storm that wiped out that bridge? Maitland himself was responsible for the destruction of the bridge. That is my theory. And is it likely that he destroyed it without leaving himself a way of escape? Obviously not. He had some way of his own of getting back on to the opposite stretch of cliffs—and a search along the gorge will no doubt reveal his method in due course."

Inspector Tawnish rubbed his chin. He was a stocky little man with a brick-red face and a bald patch at the back of his round head.

"Why, I'd never thought of that, Mr. Blake!" he confessed. "Though it did strike me, knowing that bridge as well as I do, that I never thought a gale would pull it down, a bit rockety though it was!"

Blake had moved towards the bed.

He stood staring down at the blood-stained sheets and blankets. Coutts, Tinker, and Tawnish gathered round the bed as well, Coutts gingerly lifting the bed-clothes one at a time.



"The killer left behind him that little wad of folded paper—his one mistake!"

"Nothing here," he said at last, and Blake nodded agreement. "Unlucky that stiletto hasn't any finger-prints on it."

For more than an hour, the search of the big room overlooking the sea continued, more or less in silence. Except for a small, neatly folded wad of white paper, discovered by Tinker under one of the wardrobes, and which seemed to interest Sexton Blake, they found nothing.

The wad of paper, when unfolded, proved to be a perfectly plain sheet of notepaper.

"Evidently used for keeping the door of the wardrobe closed," said Coutts, testing the wardrobe door. "This door's a bit loose—a wedge of paper jammed under it would hold it shut."

Blake made no comment.

The search for a clue to the identity of Glass' murderer came to an end, without further result, and they made their way down to the library, where Tawnish wished to interview the servants, and to take statements from the son of the murdered man and the two guests, Torres and Peterson.

Leo Glass was pale and haggard. He was sitting in a chair by the fire as Blake and Tinker and the two police officers entered the room, and he rose quickly.

"Well?" he breathed. His voice was hoarse, and his normal superciliousness of manner had left him utterly.

Torres, the Argentine, was standing near him, drawing quietly at a cigarette, his aquiline face perfectly composed, almost expressionless. Peterson, big, square-headed, brutal-mouthed, a man from whom little emotion would be expected, seemed the less cool of the two.

"Well?" He echoed Leo Glass' hoarse query, and his voice was harsh. "Any clue to show who he was—this fellow Maitland?"

"None," said Tawnish. He glanced, a trifle diffidently, at Sexton Blake.

"I speak with due deference to Mr. Blake's opinion," he continued hastily. "Mr. Blake has a theory that perhaps Maitland and the girl were not in the car at all when it went over the edge, but had a secret means of reaching the mainland, which they took, after running the car into the gorge as a blind."

"That is my opinion," agreed Sexton Blake. "In fact, I am quite sure of it! I certainly hope I am right," he added slowly. "For it seems evident that this man who came here calling himself Maitland knows a great deal about the facts hidden behind this murder."

Torres was looking at Blake keenly.

"You say Maitland knew the facts behind this crime," he said, "but surely there can be no doubt that it was Maitland himself who committed it? He came to steal the Quichua bowl, and, in obtaining the key to the safe, he stabbed my friend——"

"No," said Blake steadily; "Maitland was not the man who stabbed him."

Coutts gave an impatient grunt under his breath.

"But look here, Mr. Blake——" began Peterson.

"In fact," went on Sexton Blake, "I can tell you now the name of the murderer." He was looking at no one; his eyes were on the leaping flames of the log-fire.

"What?" cried Coutts.

All eyes were riveted upon Sexton Blake. In the sudden startled hush the dull crash of waves at the foot of the cliffs could be plainly heard.

Leo Glass started forward, quivering hands clenched at his sides. The eyes of the Luiz Torres were like dark points of ice. Peterson, the small whisky-glass in his hand, thrust his jaw forward, his big frame suddenly tense.

"What the dickens do you mean, Blake?" breathed Coutts almost angrily. "You said nothing of this before——"

"It was only as we were coming downstairs that I realised it," Blake told him, with a strange, hard smile.

"If it wasn't Maitland it was someone in this house!" jerked out Peterson grimly. "So what do you really mean?"

"Maitland came and went. Why not another?" Blake was refilling his pipe—quiet, nonchalant. "Be that as it may, the murderer was in this house last night. He was here when Maitland was here. And it was he who left behind him in the room that little folded wad of notepaper; his one mistake!" His eyes had turned to Coutts.

Coutts stared at Blake in sheer bewilderment. Inspector Tawnish was equally mystified, and showed it.

"But what can that piece of paper tell you?" ejaculated Tawnish wonderingly. "Why, it was perfectly plain—there was not any writing, nothing——"

"No," agreed Blake; "just an ordinary, plain piece of paper, inspector. But it enables me to tell you the name of the man you are seeking for the murder of Siegfried Glass; and the name of the man responsible for the murder of Lang, the American, at the Milanese."

The room was growing dusky; but the light from the fire played across the strong face of Sexton Blake, lit up the remorseless eyes. Leo Glass had dropped unsteadily into his chair. Torres, the Argentine, and Peterson—big and dominant against the flickering firelight—watched and waited.

"Well?" jerked out Coutts. "If it wasn't Maitland, who was it?"

"A man whom Maitland knows a good deal about, at least," answered Sexton Blake. "A man whose name you, too, will know, Coutts—for ten years ago Scotland Yard were leaving no stone unturned to get their hands on him! But he eluded them, vanished as if into thin air. It's known he went to the Argentine, for he was seen in Buenos Aires. Then he disappeared off the face of the earth! But I tell you he is back in England. A famous crook if ever there was one! Not the least of his claims to fame is the fact that he was recognised as being the cleverest forger since Jim the Penman. And even then, at the time of his disappearance, his name stood for a double murder! How he links in with the man we know as Maitland we can't know yet; but they are linked in, for certain. Enemies perhaps——"

Coutts gave a sudden startled ejaculation; his eyes blazed.

"By Heaven!" he cried. "Good lord, Blake, you don't mean Flaxman? Conrad Flaxman——"

The Yard man's words snapped off.

Leo Glass had half risen in his chair as Blake was speaking, a strange look in his effeminately handsome face; but at the name that Coutts had given he toppled forward, face ashen, and collapsed on to the floor in a dead faint.

— —

The Nameless Man.

LONDON was in the grip of fog; a heavy, clammy mist that had come rolling up the Thames early in the afternoon, spreading slowly. Now, near midnight, even the outskirts of the city were thickly enshrouded. An uncanny hush filled the deserted streets, where men moved like ghosts, and the lights of crawling vehicles glimmered like vague, blind eyes through the murk.

From an upper window of a silent, fog-bound house a man was peering into the swirling haze, his thin hands clutching the bars that spanned the panes—a man whose staring eyes were alive with terror, whose wasted frame trembled uncontrollably. Difficult to have told his age; gaunt and haggard, with greying hair, the slenderly built figure might have been that of a man of fifty, or that of a man of scarcely thirty, prematurely aged by some nerve-breaking ordeal.

A twisted length of wire clutched in one of the unsteady hands showed the means by which he had succeeded in unlocking the shutters that now stood open inside the room, the heavy wooden shutters that had been secured across the barred window of his prison. The room itself was small and not ill-furnished, with a softly carpeted floor and deep chairs, the walls lined with bookcases. But to the emaciated man who had spent long months imprisoned there it was a place of terror.

It was the work of a few moments to tie one end of his improvised rope of sheets to the strong steel bars of the window. He stood listening. No sound. The uncanny hush of the fog-bound house was unbroken.

Taking a heavy ornament from the chimneypiece, he half raised it before the window, as if to deal the shattering blow that was to open the way to freedom. But then——

He spun round, with a hoarse cry, as he heard a sound behind him that made his blood run cold.

The door had opened, and a man was standing framed there, looking in at him with baleful eyes.

Slowly the vase slipped from the captive's nerveless fingers, to shatter at his feet. He recoiled against the window bars, his face grey-white with terror. His lips formed a name soundlessly:

"Flaxman!"

The man in the doorway came slowly forward into the room and halted, his eyes never leaving the terrified eyes of the other man. Suddenly he drew a gun from his pocket. Then, with a gesture, he indicated the open shutters.

"Close those shutters!"

The prisoner obeyed, the trembling hands scarcely capable of performing their task. The man addressed as Flaxman pocketed his gun and watched in silence, a queer and dreadful smile upon his lips. His smile seemed to hold the eyes of his victim as a snake's eyes hold those of a cornered rat. He seemed as though he would faint with horror, so bloodless was his face. Then, with a whimpering moan, he flung himself forward on to his knees at Flaxman's feet.

"No, no!" He was fawning round the other's knees, half sobbing. "Don't punish me—don't punish me! I won't try again! I'll never try to escape! I swear it! For the love of Heaven——"

"Get up!"

Flaxman dragged him to his feet and sent him reeling to the wall with a calmly deliberate stroke of his open hand across the twitching face. The blow left a crimson weal.

"No, you won't try to escape again!" He spoke with cool contempt. "You dog! I am going to keep you drugged in future. Drugs that will rot away your mind and make you dead to all around you. You've asked for it, you fool——"

"No, no! For Heaven's sake! Not that!"

"Stop that cursed whimpering!" Flaxman's voice was cold, remorseless. "Think yourself lucky I'm keeping you alive at all. But it's best for you to forget everything! To forget who you are——"

"To forget who I am?" The man by the wall echoed the words in frightened bewilderment.

"Yes; you'll even forget that when the dope eats into your brain! So as not to remind you, you'll be called by another name in future." He smiled evilly. "A cipher will do. 'Z'! You'll simply be Z for as long as it seems wise to keep you alive!"

He turned to a bell by the door and pressed it.

Cowering back against the wall, the unknown victim stared at him dazedly; then, with a sob, covered his face with his wasted hands.

. . . . . .

Beneath the bell of the second-floor flat at No. 22, Felborne Terrace, Bayswater, a small brass plate bore the name:

"MR. HULBERT PETERSON."

No. 22, Felborne Terrace, was a tall four-storied stucco-fronted house overlooking Kensington Gardens—an exactly similar building to the rest of the long stretch of cream-painted houses in the terrace, except for the one fact that, whereas all the others were fully tenanted, No. 22 was unoccupied except for its second-floor flat—Peterson's.



When it comes to top-notch villainy, it's Frankula first, with Rudolph nowhere. Real dastardly doings next week!

On a day of the week that followed the Siegfried and Lang murders Hulbert Peterson sat at the big desk in his room overlooking the Bayswater Road and the Park beyond, with a thick cigar between his teeth and a savage scowl on his heavy, square, scarred face. His pig-like eyes glared at the man who faced him, a big blue-clad figure with sea captain written all over him.

"What the devil's the matter with you, Seebohm?" snarled Peterson.

"It's true what I say in my letter," answered the other doggedly. "That ship isn't seaworthy. You could stick your finger through her plates if you wanted to. And the engine-room—terrible state! She needs new——"

"Haven't I said you can get any new stuff into her that you want?" snarled Peterson.

"Yes; but——"

"Then what are you grumbling at?"

The sea captain shifted in his chair.

"All the new gear in the world wouldn't put the Plaza Mayo right for deep water," he said defiantly. "She's rotten! If she were under the British flag—or German or Dutch—they wouldn't allow——"

"She isn't!" grinned Peterson—not a pleasant grin. "She's under the Argentine flag, Seebohm! And under the Argentine flag she's going to sail to Buenos Aires on the thirtieth——"

Captain Seebohm made a helpless gesture.

"It's a coffin ship!" he almost groaned.

Peterson flicked the ash from his cigar on to the carpet and thrust the cigar back into his mouth. His jaw protruded as he glared at the man facing him.

"Listen, Seebohm! If you don't like the idea of doing as you're told you can quit. Nothing to stop you, is there? I can get a dozen—a score—a hundred master mariners to run her down to B. A. for me—at half the price I'm paying you! By Heaven, I've a good mind to sack you here and now and find a man who does as he's told without argument! You wouldn't find it easy to get another job——"

Seebohm licked his lips. His face was a little grey under its tan.

He knew very well that it would be impossible for him to obtain another job. A master mariner with a bad accident at sea marked up against him has no chance these days. Also, he had a wife and family in Newcastle dependent on him.

"I'm paying you well, Seebohm—thundering well! And I'm paying you well not to argue or ask questions! If you don't like the pay, clear off, and be hanged to you!"

For a moment Captain Seebohm seemed about to make further protest. Then he rose to his feet in a helpless way

"Very good," he said. "I'll take her, of course, since you say so."

"I'll come down to the docks and have a look at her myself," growled Peterson. "Any new stuff you want, order it. Don't spare expense. Money's nothing! But she's the ship I want."

The greenish eyes of Hulbert Peterson were ugly as he watched Seebohm ushered from the room by the manservant, who had appeared in answer to Peterson's touch on the bell. For some minutes he stood smoking his cigar, thinking. Then he went to his desk, and for a while busied himself with papers and documents But soon he was interrupted by another visitor

Luiz Torres was immaculate that morning in silk hat and spats Peterson greeted him with a curt nod. Without a word of greeting, he produced a cheque-book, wrote out a cheque drawn on a London bank for three hundred pounds, blotted it, and handed it to the Argentine.

"Thanks!" Torres, standing by Peterson's desk, had been unashamedly reading the letter that still lay at its recipient's elbow. "So Seebohm is making trouble eh?"

"That's where you're wrong!" said Peterson in sardonic tones. "He came here with an ache, but he left as mild as a spring lamb! He'll do what he's told. He can't afford not to."

Torres shrugged.

"But why risk her going down? You buy a ship to sail her to Buenos Aires—why not make sure she gets there?"

Peterson rose to his feet. His scarred face was smiling.

"You don't understand, Luiz," he said softly. "You don't understand! I don't want the Plaza Mayo to get to B.A. In fact, I am going to make thundering sure that she never does! I want her to go down!"

Torres stared at him, rather aghast.

"A coffin ship for somebody?" he muttered.

"A coffin ship for somebody," agreed Peterson, smiling.

They left the room together. And in the second-floor flat of No. 23, in the room adjacent to that in which Torres and Peterson had been talking, Dearth Tallon, listening through a tube sunk into the wall, heard the door close behind them.

He turned away from the wall and stood frowning in the centre of the room, grimly thoughtful.

Tallon had been in possession of the flat in No. 23 for several weeks—had taken it in the knowledge that it was adjacent to Peterson's. But though he had put curtains in the windows to give the place an air of occupation from outside, the rooms were still bare and unfurnished. Its sole purpose, so far as Tallon was concerned, was that tube driven through the wall to the wallpaper of the room in the next flat, by means of which Dearth Tallon had been able to inform himself for some time past of the mysterious doings of Mr. Hulbert Peterson.

He left the flat, locking the door behind him. Two minutes later he was stepping into a taxi.

"Casson Street," he ordered the driver.

Casson Street, in Westminster, was where he was living for the time being—Dearth Tallon changed his place of abode not infrequently, for precautionary reasons.

As the taxi turned into the park to cut through to Hyde Park Corner, there was a sardonic grin on Tallon's lips.

"Flaxman," he whispered softly, "I'm after you! And I'll get you where I want you!" He raised his hands as if gripping an invisible throat. "And that's with your neck between these two hands."

For Sexton Blake was not the only one who sought for Conrad Flaxman, the man from Buenos Aires, whom he had reason to believe was the murderer of Siegfried Glass, and the man responsible, too, for the poisoning of Lang, the American detective.

It had been on the trail of Conrad Flaxman that Dearth Tallon had gone to Skarr Hall, for his own grim, secret reasons.

In the records of a London mortuary there had appeared, some years before, the name of Raymond Hope, a youngster who had leapt into the dark-flowing Thames from the Tower Bridge one tragic night, after having been robbed of his last penny by a crook syndicate that had thought little at the time of bleeding a rich young fool white. Conrad Flaxman had been one of that crook syndicate. A syndicate long broken up, but two of its members had already died to pay for the death of Raymond Hope.

Raymond Hope had had a brother, a man who had turned crook from force of bitter circumstances, and changed his name. Dearth Hope had become Dearth Tallon, the avenger, seeking out his victims one by one, living by his wits meanwhile.

"I'll get you, Flaxman, as I got Ivory and Sangster!" whispered Tallon softly, as the speeding taxi crossed the Serpentine bridge.

Until the hue-and-cry for the man and woman believed by Scotland Yard to be connected with the murder of Siegfried Glass should have died down. Tallon was harbouring Sonia March at the Casson Street flat.

Tallon found the girl smoking a cigarette in the big living-room overlooking the street.

She had been looking at a newspaper, and handed it to him, pointing to a paragraph in the Personal Column:

"D. A. L. wishes to thank, with deepest gratitude, the anonymous donor of the sum received."

"Lancaster's put that in," said Sonia March laconically. Lancaster, as Tallon knew, was the name of the old antique dealer whom Siegfried Glass had cheated in purchasing for a ridiculously inadequate sum the Quichua bowl which Sonia March had so recklessly resolved to return—by its value in cash—to the old man. The sum of money had been sent to him two days before. "He'd give a lot to know where that three thousand pounds came from—and why. That's a safe bet."

Tallon nodded, taking a cigar from the box on the table—one of his usual long, thin Manuelas.

"Sure, he's wondering! Three thousand one-pound notes, out of the blue! Well, the bargain suits me."

She surveyed him curiously.

"You haven't told me why you wanted that bowl," she said.

"Haven't I?" He crossed to a desk by the wall and unlocked one of the drawers. When he turned towards her again the dull yellow bowl, with its insets of ancient, coloured stone, was in his hand. He put it on the table with a flickering smile. "See those?"

He indicated some patches of white powder on the inner side of the rim.

"I don't understand."

"Fingerprints," he told her grimly. "The powder is to bring them out. I guessed they'd be there all right."

"Whose fingerprints?"

She was puzzled.

"The fingerprints of Siegfried Glass and his son, Leo; and of their two guests on that night at Skarr Hall—Hulbert Peterson and Torres, the Argentine," he answered, his voice queerly harsh. "Theirs, I'm sure. And one of those fingerprints tallies with a fingerprint I've been trying to match for months, Sonia. The fingerprint of Conrad Flaxman!"

YOUR CHARACTER FROM YOUR FINGER-PRINT

The Editor regrets that, owing to the extra length of this week's complete story, Captain John Miller's popular finger-print feature has had to be held out. It will be on this page again next Thursday. Meanwhile, of course, you can still send your prints to Captain Miller for a free character-reading.

Remember—four impressions of your left thumb-print; your signature and age; the number of this issue cut from the top of page 2; a stamped, addressed envelope for quick personal reply. Address your letters to Captain J. Miller, c/o Detective Weekly, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.

Down River.

THERE were three figures, each well muffled up against the intense cold, in the police-launch slipping silently down river against the tide. A bitter, south-east wind was cutting across the water from the dark wharves lining the farther bank, slapping the dancing waves hard across the launch's bows. To the left, the lights of the Embankment glimmered through the murk; ahead, close-packed lines of brightly lighted double-deck trams were gliding over Blackfriars Bridge. The launch slipped through one of the wide arches of the bridge, on past the dark mass of a moored lighter, and under the railway bridge beyond. The man at the helm swung the bows of the launch across the river, heading for the south bank.

The three muffled figures in the launch were silent—one of them, at least, wrapped in deep thought, as he drew quietly at a well-smoked, curving briar.

"Blessed if I can see why you want to take a look at the Plaza Mayo, Blake." The third figure in the launch spoke rather grumblingly as he glanced across at the man with the pipe. "Just because this fellow Torres has bought her up——"

Blake smiled in the darkness. His habit of reticence always irritated Inspector Coutts, he knew.

"Torres was at Skarr Hall the night Siegfried Glass was murdered," he answered in laconic tones. "Therefore, anything Torres does interests me."

Detective-Inspector Coutts grunted, far from satisfied.

"There she is, Mr. Blake."

The river officer pointed ahead. They had passed the Tower Bridge, and Sholt's Wharf, where the Plaza Mayo lay, was only a short distance ahead. As they drew nearer they could make out by the lights of an adjacent vessel, the name on the stained, black stern, together with the port of register:

PLAZA MAYO
BUENOS AIRES

The launch slowed down, sliding in towards the bank, engine softly chugging. Blake, in the bows, stared up at the great, black shape of the South American steamer with keenly intent eyes.

Her crimson port light stared down at the three men in the launch like a glaring blood-red eye. A sailor was busy at some job on the fore-peak, working by the light of a swaying lantern.

Blake spoke to the man at the launch's helm, and the police-boat circled the anchored ship watchfully. They had completed the circuit and were swinging round the bows of their quarry when there was a sudden warning shout from Coutts.

A small row-boat, pulling across their path towards the anchored ship, carelessly handled, had suddenly caught sight of them, and the man at the oars had hastily back-paddled—just as the launch swung to pass behind the skiff. With the launch in the grip of the tide, collision was inevitable. For a moment the police-boat quivered as the inspector at the helm slammed through into reverse, then the launch's bows had struck the row-boat amidships.

"Help!"

The skiff had vanished, swallowed by the swift, oily waters. Near them, those in the launch could make out a struggling figure that sank and rose again.

Once more the launch leapt forward, swinging towards the swimming man, skilfully manœuvred. Blake and Coutts grasped him almost simultaneously and hauled him on board.

With chattering teeth the rescued man sank on to a thwart, water streaming from his clothes, face deathly white in the gloom.

"What in blazes did you want to back-paddle for?" growled Coutts.

He pulled out an electric lamp and flashed it into the stranger's face.

"Gosh!" he ejaculated.

It was a face that both he and Sexton Blake knew well—Leo Glass.

As yet he had had no opportunity of recognising Sexton Blake and the Yard man. Sexton Blake was surveying him with queerly gleaming eyes.

"You were going out to the Plaza Mayo?" he said abruptly.

Leo Glass nodded, with a shuddering gasp. He seemed to pull himself together with an effort.

"Yes."

"We'll get you on board."

"The quicker the better" growled Coutts. "You found the river pretty chilly, I'll bet, Mr. Glass?"

The shivering man started at the use of his name, and peered in a startled way through the gloom.

"Yes, it's Inspector Coutts and me, Mr. Glass," said Blake, with a reassuring smile. "We certainly never expected to find you here, in the Pool."

Leo Glass stared back at them in a strange way. His teeth chattered.

"What—why——" he stammered, but broke off with his question unasked.

Sicied Glass and his son,

The river detective—his name was Hardy, a lantern-jawed man in the thirties—was nosing the launch between two lighters to the foot of the ladder that hung down the side of the Plaza Mayo.

"Hallo, there!"

A voice called sharply from above, and the vivid beam of an electric lamp ripped through the gloom, playing upon the launch below.

"It's all right," called Leo Glass quickly.

The torch went out, and a lantern came swinging over the side to light the ladder for them. Blake swarmed up it with lithe ease, and the drenched figure of Glass followed him, dropping on to the iron deck at his side. The Yard man and the river detective joined him—the launch had been tied up.

The ship's officer who had challenged them was a stout, dark-complexioned man who looked un-English though his speech was perfect. A South American, Blake guessed. It was evident that the man knew Leo Glass. At sight of his soaked clothing he gave an exclamation.

"What's happened?"

"We ran Mr. Glass down—an unlucky accident," explained Blake. "I suppose he can have a change of clothes?"

"Sure!" grinned the officer. "Mr. Torres is on board," he added to Glass. "You wanted to see him?"

"Yes," snapped Leo Glass. He had recovered from his fright, and was now in a thoroughly bad temper. He glanced hesitantly at Blake and the two police-officers. "Better come down to the saloon and have a drink," he jerked out grudgingly, and turned to lead the way, looking considerably—as Coutts remarked later—like a drowned rat.

The saloon of the Plaza Mayo was unusually large and comfortable, considering the size of the ship. A couple of oil-stoves provided warmth that was very pleasant after the bitter cold outside.

Senor Luiz Torres was seated at the table, a number of documents before him, a thin cigarette between his lips. His aquiline face, with its vividly piercing eyes, glanced up as they entered—and for a moment, at sight of Blake and Detective-Inspector Coutts, he froze in his chair. Then he rose quickly, and came towards them smilingly, with extended hand.

"Mr. Blake—Inspector! Delighted to see you!" The soft, foreign voice held a hospitable ring. "May I ask to what I owe the pleasure——" He broke off as his eyes fell on Leo Glass' drenched condition. "Good heavens, Leo——"

Leo Glass snarled an angry explanation, and hurried away to change his garments. He was evidently perfectly at home aboard the ship. Torres waved his visitors to the swivel chairs clamped at either side of the long table.

"I presume it was more than coincidence that explains the fact of it being you gentlemen who were occupying the launch that ran our friend down?" he said smilingly. "You were visiting the ship, of course?"

Coutts glanced at Sexton Blake, who nodded.

"Exactly. I had heard you were on board here to-night, Mr. Torres——"

"And I presume it was concerning the mysterious, tragic death of my poor friend, Mr. Siegfried Glass, that you wished to see me?" The Argentine's eyes were fastened upon Sexton Blake rather intently. "Anything I can possibly do——"

He touched a bell in the woodwork behind him, and broke off as a door at the far corner of the saloon opened. A steward was framed there.

"Bring some wine, Smith."

"Very good, sir!"

The man who had appeared in answer to Torres' ring vanished. Blake stared after him thoughtfully.

Where had he seen that wiry little figure with the rattlesnake eyes before?

Leo Glass entered the room soon after the steward had brought the wine and gone, wearing what looked like a suit of one of the ship's officers. He sat down sulkily beside Coutts and lit a cigarette, helping himself to a glass of wine.

"How's the investigation gettin' along—over the—the murder of the poor old pater?" asked Leo Glass slowly, glancing round from Coutts to Sexton Blake with shadowed eyes.

Blake glanced across at him.

"You may rest assured, Mr. Glass, that neither I nor Inspector Coutts will leave any stone unturned to bring your father's murderer to justice," he said slowly.

"Pray Heaven you succeed," breathed Leo huskily, and raised his glass to his lips.

He sipped the wine; the others were doing the same.

"Somethin' rummy about the flavour of this stuff——" he began.

His words trailed off incoherently. Lights were whirling before his eyes, and the panelling behind Sexton Blake seemed to dissolve into a queer mist.

The next moment his head had slumped down on to his chest, eyes closed, his breath heavy, strangely loud.

For a few seconds Luiz Torres had stared at Leo Glass, bewildered. But he, too, had drunk deep of the wine; and he, too, lost consciousness almost on the instant.

Sexton Blake saw Coutts and Hardy drop; then he, too, closed his eyes heavily, and sat inert, his head sunk forward upon his chest.

The door at the far end of the saloon opened softly. The steward—Smith—stepped in, and crossed towards the table. For some moments he halted, his black, beady eyes travelling round that circle of five drugged men.

Then he went round the end of the table and halted by Sexton Blake.

Blake's pocket-book was lying on the table before him. Smith picked it up and ran through it. His grunt, as he laid it down again, seemed to show that he had found nothing to interest him. He slid a hand into the detective's breast-pocket, and his fingers found a smaller book.

He was about to draw it out when a hand closed like steel claws upon his wrist.

Sexton Blake had raised his head—was staring up into the steward's face with quietly smiling eyes. His grip of the other's wrist did not relax.

"I want you, Flack!" said Sexton Blake, very softly.

Face to Face.

IT was seldom indeed that Flack, Dearth Tallon's faithful henchman, was taken aback. But as he stared down now into the quietly smiling eyes of Sexton Blake—and the heavy automatic beneath them—he was for the moment as completely flabbergasted as any man could have been.

Never for an instant had Flack guessed that Sexton Blake had been feigning a drugged sleep such as gripped the others—to trap him.

"Crikey!" said Flack, half-admiringly—and his lapse into his native Cockney proved the force of his emotions. "It's a fair cop!"

Blake rose, still grasping the man's wrist. Plunging the hand that held the gun into Flack's pocket, he pulled it out with two weapons in his fingers—Flack's as well as his own.

He slipped the captured gun into his pocket, and released his prisoner's wrists. Flack recoiled slowly.

"I tasted the wine before the others," explained Blake, with a grim smile. "A very brief taste, I assure you—for the smell had warned me. By the way, how is my old friend Mr. Tallon?"

"Fine, guv'nor!" grinned Flack.

"What do you know of the murder of Siegfried Glass?" snapped Blake swiftly.

"Never 'eard of 'im," said Flack.

Blake surveyed him with sardonic eyes. Flack stared back at him like a trapped and dangerous animal. He saw a sudden light of understanding spring into Blake's eyes.

"So 'John Maitland' was Dearth Tallon!" Flack heard the detective breathe.

It seemed fairly certain that Flack's presence on board the Plaza Mayo was a great deal more than mere coincidence, and Flack, as Blake knew, only worked by instructions from his old enemy, Dearth Tallon. Tallon, then, was interested in the Plaza Mayo; was in some way mixed up with the mystery behind the deaths of Siegfried Glass and Walter Lang, the American detective.

Stepping back across the heavily breathing form of Inspector Hardy, Blake moved towards the door behind him. It opened on to the port alleyway under the bridge-deck. Keeping Flack covered across the width of the saloon, he opened the door and shouted. Almost at once heavy footsteps came hurrying in answer. The swarthy South American who was second officer of the Plaza Mayo appeared in the alleyway.

He stared into the saloon with startled eyes as he caught sight of the four drugged men. But Blake was wasting no time. Within a few minutes Flack was handcuffed and locked in his cabin, and the second officer was pulling away in the ship's dinghy to get help ashore.

He was heading for a gap between two moored steamers and the wharf beyond. The night was moonless, very dark, the riding-lights of the ships glimmering on the cold, black river in dancing glints. The second officer twisted his head, and saw that he was close by the massive timber baulks of the wharf, where the tide gurgled softly, inky black. He twisted the dinghy round, making for the adjacent steps.

"You from the Plaza Mayo?"

A second dinghy had appeared out of the gloom, almost as if it had suddenly materialised on the water beside his own. The second officer found himself looking into a pair of pale, wolfish eyes, as the man in the other dinghy shipped oars and gripped his gunnel.

"Yes," said the second officer wonderingly. "Why?"

For answer the lean, muscular figure of the man with the gun scrambled swiftly from one boat to the other, seating himself on the front thwart. The South American, dazed with astonishment, felt a gun-barrel pressed against his spine.

"Back to the ship, son!" ordered the man with the pale eyes sourly.

The second officer took hold of the oars again, his swarthy face still dazed and bewildered. Obediently he turned the dinghy out into the stream.

Presently they were alongside the high black hull of the Plaza Mayo. In obedience to a muttered order, the sailor took the dinghy towards the foot of the wooden-runged rope ladder.

"That'll do!" he heard in grim tones; and then something hit him on the back of the head, and he slumped into the bottom of the boat without a sound.

The lean figure of the stranger pocketed the short rubber truncheon, and as the dinghy drifted in, caught the ladder, swinging up towards the deck above. As he dropped on to the iron plates a tall, shadowy form emerged from the opening of the alleyway near by—a man smoking a curved briar pipe.

It was Sexton Blake

"Hallo?" called Blake questioningly. It was impossible for him to see other than dimly the felt-hatted figure that was moving towards him through the gloom across the unlighted deck. "Are you the doctor?"

"Yes."

"Come into the saloon, will you?"

That the doctor should have been ferried across immediately, without waiting for the expected police, seemed natural enough. Blake had no cause for suspicion as he turned to conduct the supposed medical man to the saloon.

"A case of salathyn drugging," said Blake laconically, as he stepped from the alleyway into the saloon. "Here they are——"

"They look quite a pretty job, Blake!"

At the dry, sardonic words from behind him, Sexton Blake swung round. The tall, wolfish figure in the low-drawn black felt hat had stepped into the saloon after him; was standing for the first time in the light. And the voice was no longer disguised.

"You can stick up your fins, Blake!" came the soft, smiling command

Blake raised his hands before the menace of the levelled automatic, and suddenly he laughed.

"You!" he said coolly "And I never guessed I Mr. John Maitland—alias Dearth Tallon!"

"How's things, Blake?" grinned Tallon. "Quite a while since we met! You're looking fit. Congratulations!" He stepped forward and took the gun from Blake's pocket. Blake, knowing the man with whom he had to deal, offered no resistance. For the moment, Tallon held the trump cards, Blake knew. "I've come for that man of mine, Blake."

"How did you know we'd got him?" asked Blake, in tones of cool curiosity.

"Telepathy!" grinned Dearth Tallon. "It never fails me!" His voice was mocking.

"Can telepathy tell you anything about Conrad Flaxman?" asked Blake softly, and he smiled at the look that came into Tallon's eyes. "So you know him, Mr. Tallon?" he added, with significance.

"Sure I know Conrad Flaxman!" Tallon's slow

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Middlesbrough v. Bolton W.
PORTSMOUTH v. Everton
PRESTON N. E. v. Sunderland
STOKE v. Huddersfield
WEST BROMWICH A. v. Blackpool

Division II

Barnsley v. ASTON VILLA
BURNLEY v. Sheffield W.
BURY v. Fulham
COVENTRY v. Plymouth
LUTON v. Norwich
Manchester U. v. WEST HAM
NEWCASTLE v. Swansea
Notts Forest v. Chesterfield
SHEFFIELD U. v. Southampton
STOCKPORT v. Bradford

Division III (South)

BOURNEMOUTH v. Reading
Brighton v. MILLWALL
Bristol R. v. Bristol City
CARDIFF v. Crystal Palace
CLAPTON O. v. Exeter
MANSFIELD v. Watford
NORTHAMPTON v. Newport
QUEEN'S PARK R. v. Aldershot
SOUTHEND v. Swindon
TORQUAY v. Gillingham
WALSALL v. Notts County

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DONCASTER v. Darlington
Halifax v. LINCOLN
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ROTHERHAM v. Crewe
Southport v. Oldham
Tranmere v. Hull
York v. New Brighton

Scottish League—Division I.

ARBROATH v. Aberdeen
CLYDE v. Morton
DUNDEE v. Ayr
FALKIRK v. St. Mirren
Hibernians v. Celtic
Kilmarnock v. HEARTS
MOTHERWELL v. St. Johnstone
Partick v. THIRD LANARK
Queen of the South v. RANGERS
QUEENS PARK v. Hamilton

Probable winners in large type. No distinction indicates a draw.

answer was accompanied by a crooked grin that held no atom of mirth. "Sure I know him!"

It was at that moment that Sexton Blake leapt.

Tallon's bullet tore his thigh, and in the confined space of the ship's saloon the report of the black .45 echoed thunderously. But Blake's steel clutch fastened around the gun and forced it up. The two men struggled and reeled, their trampling feet drowning the noisy breathing of the drugged men at the table behind them.

"I want you, Tallon!" rasped Sexton Blake. "I want you—for what you know of the murder of Siegfried Glass——"

"Then take me!" jeered the other; and his fist slammed up under Blake's jaw.

Blake reeled, but only for a moment. His own fist smashed into Tallon's grinning face, and he saw the blood spurt from one of the smiling lips, but the smile remained And then his right leg seemed to give way under him. He staggered without knowing why. He did not know that his thigh had been struck—that blood was pouring from the wound. Before he could recover, Tallon's fist struck a second time, and this time Sexton Blake went to the floor in a twisted heap.

Outside, Tallon heard the pounding of heavy-booted feet on the iron decks. He raced for the farther door of the saloon.

He knew where Flack's cabin was—luckily close at hand, adjacent to the pantry. A shoulder charge smashed open the locked door.

"Come on, son!"

Flack, the handcuffs about his wrists, came quickly. He followed as Tallon led the way along the short alleyway to the dark foredeck. They were on the starboard side of the ship, and the members of the crew, who were making for the saloon as a result of that echoing shot, were all approaching from the after-deck. Tallon swung down the iron ladder that led to the deep well-deck, and Flack followed, nimble as a cat, despite his manacled wrists.

"We've got to swim for it!" jerked out Tallon. "I'll look after you, son!"

It said much for Flack's implicit faith in his master that he did not hesitate, despite his handcuffs.

He sprang lightly on to the iron gunnel, and dived. There was a second splash, drowned by the shrieking siren of an incoming tramp in mid-river, as Tallon hit the water near him. Then the tide gripped them, and whirled them away in its icy clutch.

. . . . . .

It was an hour later that Flack, now minus his handcuffs, followed Dearth Tallon into the Casson Street flat.

"Lucky you spotted my signal, captain," said Flack, with husky cheerfulness, as they dried their clothes, and Tallon nodded.

He had been watching the Plaza Mayo from the opposite wharfside, waiting for Flack to come ashore and report, when he had seen a tiny flickering light from one of the ship's portholes, which approximated to the position in which he knew Flack's cabin to be situated. And the flickering Morse message flashed by Flack's torch had put him wise to the general state of things, after which he had wasted no time.

"Blake's hot to get Flaxman, son," he muttered. "That's why he wanted you—not just for old scores. Tell me what you found out."

Flack's rattlesnake eyes glittered.

"Plenty, captain. There's something on board the Plaza Mayo; it's a thing Flaxman wanted, and didn't find. And if that ship sails for Buenos Aires, as she's booked to do, she'll founder as sure as death. She's rotten under all that paint they've sloshed over her. And if she goes down, whatever the thing is that's on board, that'll go down with her, and that's why Peterson's sending her. For whatever it is that's on board, it's the thing that's behind the killing down at Skarr Hall——"

"I get you."

Tallon nodded with thoughtful eyes.

"But there's another thing, sir," Flack said, with intent eyes. "It's to do with the Glass killing, sure enough, and if you ask me, it's about the biggest mystery of the lot!"

He sucked grimly at a cigarette.

"Well," rasped Tallon, "what's this fresh mystery of yours?"

"Who 'Senor Z' is!" answered Flack, slowly and huskily.

Dearth Tallon stared at his satellite.

"Senor Z!" he echoed. "What the devil do you mean? What's this Senor Z stuff?"

"I don't know, captain," muttered Flack. "But young Leo Glass knows. And it's what you've got to find out, captain—who is Senor Z?"

The Girl in the Rain.

HULBERT PETERSON lay back in his car with a thick cigar between his teeth, in a very satisfied frame of mind. He had been dining with Torres at the latter's house by Streatham Common, and he had seen that the mysterious Senor Z was safe in Torres' keeping.

His car was a two-thousand-pound Rolls, driven by a chauffeur in a quiet blue uniform, whose smart appearance was in direct inverse ratio to his loquacity

Ex-Detective Insp. HAROLD BRUST



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Special Notice!

Unfortunately, Mr. Brust is unable to continue his popular weekly crime queries feature. However, his unequalled experience and knowledge of all police and crime matters is still at the service of every reader of "D.W." who cares to write to him personally. He will be pleased to answer all queries sent by readers enclosing a stamped, addressed envelope quite Free. Address your letters to him c/o The Editor, "Detective Weekly," Fleetway House, Farringdon St., E.C.4.

—he never talked. It did not take him long to drive his master from the house of Luiz Torres to Bayswater. The glittering Rolls drew up outside No. 22, Felborne Terrace, as a near-by church clock struck eleven.

Peterson stepped out.

"All right, Royd. I shan't want you again to-night."

The chauffeur touched his cap and the long car glided away. Peterson, his big silk hat tilted at an assured angle on his square head, strode up the steps and entered the house.

To his surprise, the hall was in darkness.

"Tomlin!" he bellowed angrily.

There was no reply, no sound. Peterson stood listening. The quiet was almost uncanny. Except for the second-floor flat—his own—No. 22 was entirely unoccupied, a fact which was not without reason. Hulbert Peterson had reasons for liking privacy, and he had himself, under other names, rented each of the other flats in the building to ensure it.

It was he who had installed the hall-porter's box within the front door, where a man was supposed to be on duty night and day—three men in all, working in three eight-hour shifts. Their presence ensured him warning of any visitors. Mr. Hulbert Peterson did not like unexpected visitors.

"Tomlin!" he shouted again. And this time his voice held a note of sharp uneasiness.

Tomlin was the man who took duty from four in the afternoon until midnight. Peterson had always considered him a reliable man. But there was no reply, no sign of Tomlin, no sound. And if he had left his post for only a few minutes, why had he put out the lights?

"Where the devil are you?" snarled Peterson, in the darkness.

He moved forward towards the point where the light switches were, by the porter's box, and his groping hand snapped on a blaze of light. He stood staring round. A husky ejaculation broke from him.

Tomlin, a powerfully built figure of a man, with reddish hair, was lying in his box, gagged and bound, his wrists roped to his ankles, staring up at his employer with blinking, scared eyes.

And Hulbert Peterson swore violently, for he could guess what had happened at No. 22 during his absence that evening.

He dragged out a small pocket-knife. It was small but very sharp, and it sawed through the porter's bonds in rapid fashion. The man was too stiff to use his limbs, however. He lay where he was found, rubbing his wrists, staring up at Peterson's glaring eyes in fear.

"Well," said Peterson between his teeth, "who was it?"

"Two of 'em, sir," stammered Tomlin breathlessly. "A big 'un and a little 'un——"

"They've gone?"

"Yes, they've gone." Tomlin was trying to struggle up, clinging to the edge of the glass-sided box. But his cramped knees would not support him, and he sank down, in an agony of pins-and-needles. "About an hour ago——"

"You fool!" snarled Peterson. "To let them get you!" He was carrying a gold-topped cane, and in his fury he lifted it as if to strike the frightened man. "You fool——"

Turning, he raced across the hall to the stairs, pounding up to the second floor. The door of his flat was shut. He thrust in the key and flung it open, snapping on the light with a hand that trembled. Lying at his feet in the little hall of the flat, between the inner doors that opened to right and left, lay his valet, bound and gagged in the same fashion as the porter. A dark bruise on his forehead showed where he had been struck down.

Peterson did not bother with him He strode over the doubled-up form, and flung open the door of the living-room, with a curse.

A scene of confusion met his eyes. There were two desks in the room, and each had been systematically rifled, with the contents scattered on the carpet. Each drawer and cupboard in the big room had been broken open, and even the bookcase had been emptied of its contents; books lay in fallen piles before it. The contents of the large wastepaper-basket had been gone through, evidently, and flung aside. A china letter-rack lay broken on the hearth.

He went to the bed-room opposite. The same confusion prevailed there, and the glass front of a small bookcase by the head of the bed was smashed, with glass littering the floor. Peterson's greenish eyes were vicious as he stared round.

Again he began to swear vividly.

He could guess who the marauders had been: John Maitland—alias Dearth Tallon—together with the man who had taken the job of steward on board the Plaza Mayo. Smith, as he had called himself. From Torres, who had got his information from Sexton Blake, Peterson had learned of that mysterious pair's activity on board.

"What's their game?" he asked himself fiercely. "What in blazes are they working for?"

It was the very mystery of it that was beginning to frighten him. Luckily nothing dangerous had been taken.

And then an idea struck him, and he grinned in an ugly way. He swung towards the door and hurried down to the street.

He hailed a taxi.

"Drive me to Scotland Yard," said Hulbert Peterson, "and don't waste time about it!"

He was smiling as he took his seat and the taxi slid out from the kerb. The sheer brazenness of his present move pleased him considerably. Peterson's sense of humour was on the sardonic side.

Despite the hour, Detective-Inspector Coutts was in his office in the world-famous building, overlooking the Thames Embankment, at the moment when Hulbert Peterson entered his taxi in the Bayswater Road to drive to the Yard. And the detective-inspector was not alone.

Sexton Blake was sitting in the austerely furnished room, examining the contents of a large envelope that Coutts had handed to him. The Yard man was watching him with a certain degree of eagerness.

From the envelope Blake had taken a number of foreign currency notes: three one-thousand-franc notes, endorsed with the name of the French Republic, several United States thousand-dollar bills, Argentine notes for various numbers of pesos, as well as a couple of comparatively small Dutch notes. With the aid of a magnifying-glass, he was examining them keenly at length.

"Well?" urged Coutts at last.

Blake glanced up.

"Amazing workmanship," he muttered. "Simply amazing! Never seen cleverer 'slush.'"

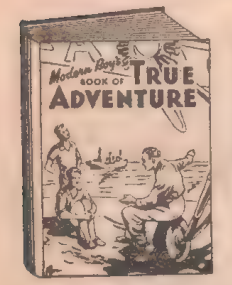
"It is pretty good," nodded Coutts, with an air of reluctant admiration. "And there's a flood of it being pushed out, Blake—a flood of it! In nearly every European and American capital. The organisation behind it must be colossal."

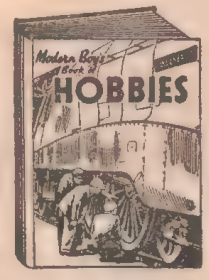
He glanced at a paper at his elbow.

"I've got reports here from Paris, Amsterdam,

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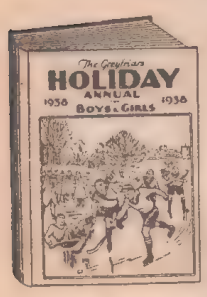


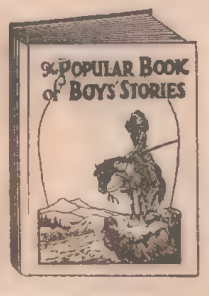
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New York and Chicago, Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. The same story every time. Flash notes being slipped into circulation from an unknown source. But it's obvious there must be some big central organisation, because the stuff is all the same workmanship, obviously."

"Obviously," agreed Blake, laying the little wad of forged notes on the table. "And whoever is working this racket got Lang. Lang knew something—maybe a lot. He knew too much, anyway, to be allowed to go on living. And if they hadn't got him—whoever 'they' are—that night at the Milanese he would have told me what he knew, I think."

"Siegfried Glass knew something, too," muttered Coutts. "Must have, eh?"

"Undoubtedly. Lang mentioned him in connection with this 'slush' racket, and he certainly didn't mention him without reason."

Coutts nodded.

"By the way," he said, "I had a phone call from young Leo Glass to-day. Said he was scared of going back to Skarr Hall alone, and wanted police protection."

"Looks as though he thinks someone's after his skin."

"Yes. I gave him a note to Inspector Tawnish."

Coutts ran the "slush" notes slowly through his fingers with a deeply reflective frown.

"There's not a thing in the world to connect either Peterson or Torres with the murder of Glass," he broke out abruptly. "They were in the house at the time, but so were other people, servants, who all seem innocent enough Yet I've got a hunch——"

"That Peterson and Torres, like our young friend Leo, know something?" Blake was smiling, and it was a smile that somehow exasperated Coutts.

"Look here, Blake! If you've got an idea about Peterson and Torres, I wish you'd spill it!" he grumbled. "And this fellow Dearth Tallon, who went to the house that night, calling himself Maitland, and put his servant on the Plaza Mayo, Torres' ship——"

"The Plaza Mayo is Torres' ship in name only," interrupted Blake. "Peterson is the real owner. But I fancy he wanted to keep the ship under the Argentine flag, which could only be done, of course, if it were Argentine owned."

Coutts fiddled restlessly with a penholder, his eyes on Blake.

"You know, suppose you're wrong, Blake, in thinking it was this fellow Flaxman that murdered Glass? Oh, I know your reason for thinking so—just the sort of subtle reasoning stuff you're so blessed fond of!" he interjected sourly. "But suppose that was just a coincidence that you're working on? Because the circumstantial evidence in favour of Maitland—that is, Tallon—having bumped off Glass is so thundering strong——"

Blake shook his head, smiling.

"That would be the easy theory, wouldn't it, Coutts? But that clue I told you of was no coincidence, I am convinced. That's the sort of coincidence that doesn't happen!"

He took from his pocket a folded sheet of perfectly plain notepaper—the piece of paper he had found in the room where Siegfried Glass had died.

"I tell you, Coutts, this paper tells the name of the murderer of Glass as plainly as if he had signed it with pen and ink!" said Sexton Blake, with quiet grimness. "I am sure I am right. And if I am, it was Conrad Flaxman, back from Buenos Aires after his ten-year-old vanishing trick——"

They were interrupted by a tap on the door.

It was a police-corporal, and the name that he spoke caused Blake's eyes to gleam oddly—the name of Hulbert Peterson.

Coutts returned the false notes to the drawer, and a few moments later the big, fair-headed man was stepping into the room.

The square, scarred face, with its greenish eyes—eyes matched by the emerald ring that Peterson always wore on one of his thick fingers—turned from Coutts to Sexton Blake.

"'Evening, gentlemen!" rasped Peterson. "Lucky to catch you in, I suppose, Mr. Coutts—and doubly lucky to find Mr. Blake here with you!"

He bowed stiffly towards Blake, in the German fashion he had unconsciously adopted in his German university days.

"An unexpected pleasure for me, Mr. Peterson," murmured Sexton Blake, as they shook hands. "Nothing wrong, I hope?"

He was watching the grim expression on the brutal face. Its look showed that Peterson's was by no means a casual visit.

"Yes," said Peterson savagely, "there is something wrong! My flat has been broken into——"

"Burglary?" put in Coutts.

"Burglary be hanged!" snarled Peterson. "It was that fellow Dearth Tallon, and his rat of an accomplice! I'm sure of it, from the description I've had of them. Lord knows what they were after——"

"Let's hear the details, Mr. Peterson," said Coutts quickly.

He pushed forward a chair, and Peterson sat down. He told his story in savage tones.

"You have no idea why this man Tallon should have wished to break into your flat?" asked Coutts, as Peterson finished.

"None in the world."

He fastened his greenish eyes on Sexton Blake.

"I remember you had a theory that some scoundrel called Flaxman killed Glass. If I were a betting man, I'd lay a thousand it was this fellow Tallon. Why, it's obvious——"

"Nothing, I find, is really obvious," interrupted Blake smilingly. He glanced at Coutts. "Suppose we go with Mr. Peterson to his flat at once?"

Coutts nodded, rising to his feet.

"Good!" said Peterson. "You professional fellows may be able to get some sort of a clue to what the hound was after. It's a mystery to me. And if you can get on his trail——"

"Unfortunately, Mr. Dearth Tallon is a somewhat elusive gentleman, I have always found," murmured Sexton Blake. "However——"

Rain was falling steadily by the time the taxi which they had taken in Whitehall arrived at Felborne Terrace. They hurried up the steps. The porter, Tomlin, was seated in his box, and rose quickly at their entry.

"This is one of the fellows they tied up," said Peterson.

Tomlin, questioned by Coutts, could add nothing to the details that Peterson had already given. They went on up the stairs to the flat above. There they found Peterson's valet still tidying up the rooms. The bruise on his forehead stood out purplish black against the sallowness of his skin.

He could give no information regarding the mysterious visitors who had ransacked the place while he had lain tied up in the hall after recovering consciousness, and they dismissed him to his own quarters.

"A pity you didn't have everything left as you found it, Mr. Peterson," grunted Coutts, as he stood glancing round the big living-room at Blake's side. "But that can't be helped now."

He began a cursory examination of the room. He was quite without hope that any clue would be unearthed which might put them on the track of Dearth Tallon. Blake remained in the centre of the floor, stick in hand, drawing slowly at his pipe, his eyes moving keenly round.

He had been keenly interested to view Peterson's flat—for reasons of his own. Peterson was watching him.

Blake moved at last, crossing to the left-hand wall of the room. Stooping a trifle, he examined a point on the wall on which his eyes had suddenly become intent.

A tiny jagged tear in the wallpaper, so small as to have been unnoticeable to the average eye, was the object of his interest. With a finger-nail he probed open the little tear, and a spot or two of white plaster fell away.

"What's that, Blake?" asked Coutts casually.

"I am not sure," answered Blake. "But I rather think——"

The next moment he had apparently thrust his finger into the solid wall. Withdrawing it from the jagged hole he had made in the paper, he glanced across at the startled Peterson.

"I am afraid some person at present unknown has been violating the privacy of your flat for some time past," he observed dryly.

"I don't understand!" grated Peterson harshly. "What the devil——"

He crossed swiftly to Blake's side. Blake was tearing away the wallpaper at the point of interest. A jagged hole in the plaster was revealed, half an inch in diameter. Flashing in the light of an electric torch, he saw that the hole which pierced the wall was lined with metal—a slim metal tube driven through the wall from the farther side.

"Who occupies the adjacent flat?" Sexton Blake spoke with dry amusement. Peterson found the look in the steady grey eyes unreadable.

He himself was standing breathless and aghast. The significance of that hidden tube that Blake had discovered had swept over him like a numbing, icy wave.

What might a listener at the other side of that wall not have heard in the past days?

He found his voice with an effort. His big figure had gone strangely cold.

"Good lord!" he whispered. "Good lord!"

Blake raised a swift hand with a gesture for silence. He put his ear to the tube, listened for a moment, and stepped back with a hand pressed over the opening.

"There is someone there now!" he rasped. "Quick, Coutts!"

Coutts had been standing near them with an astonished look on his bulldog face. But, in response to Blake's words, he leapt towards the door. Peterson followed with huge strides, and Sexton Blake hurried after them—swift enough despite his limp.

The three men tore down the stairs. As they emerged on to the steps outside they heard the door of the next house close, and were in time to see a hurrying figure vanishing through the rain-swept darkness.

"A girl!" ejaculated Coutts.

He sprang down the steps. Peterson, with an oath, raced after him. As they reached the pavement the light of a street-lamp glimmered for a moment on

Please turn to page 16.

Human Drama and Gripping Suspense in a Story of the Border Country.





The MASTER of STARKRIDGE

By JEFFREY GAUNT

Starkridge Farm.

"EVIL, lying hypocrite! From now on I disown ye and cast ye out——" Old Jacob Marston's raging denunciation was never completed His very fury against his good-looking wastrel of a younger son, Paul, was his undoing; for in the midst of it the tyrannical, granite-hard master of Starkridge collapsed with a stroke.

If he recovered then Paul Marston's course was finished. It needed only that thought, besides the bitter hatred he had always had for his father, to steel Paul to his task of—murder!

Jacob Marston's will left Starkridge and all he owned to Michael, Paul's elder brother; but Paul, hiding his bitter fury, planned otherwise, and, with a forged and apparently earlier will, made himself master of Starkridge in Michael's place.

But danger lay ahead. Paul had needed witnesses to the false will, and he had made use of his secret love affair with Hilda Thomson, his shepherd's wife, to persuade her—and, through her, her husband—into signing it. But then Ned Thomson threatened to talk, and in a savage fight between the two men Paul killed him. Thomson's weighted body vanished for ever into the black depths of Pike's Pool.

Knowing full well what life at Starkridge would be like with Paul in command, Michael Marston left the farm, taking his mother with him. As his housekeeper, Paul engaged Betty Myers, one of the two good-looking daughters of a local farm labourer, and it was in the girl's bed-room one night that Hilda Thomson found them in each other's arms.

That discovery was her death warrant, for that same night Paul killed her secretly, burning down the cottage to destroy all traces of his crime.

But not even yet was the dreadful chain of killings complete. Peg Blith, a gipsy girl he had betrayed, returned to threaten him with scandal and exposure. Again there was only one way out. Peg Blith died, swiftly and brutally; her father, old Eli, was as big a danger to Paul Marston, and he paid the same penalty Then, with faked evidence, Paul fastened the murder of Peg Blith on to her own dead father—a cunning, sardonic twist.

If for no other reason, the two gipsies had had to die, because they menaced Paul's latest and most ambitious scheme—to marry lovely Joan Harvey and some day to become Squire of Haggerstaw. Already his clever love-making had won the girl's heart; but Colonel Harvey, her father, knowing Paul's reputation, refused point-blank his consent to the marriage.

Within twenty-four hours the colonel was dead; and only Paul knew that the fatal "heart attack" was his fiendish work—cyanide poisoning! The one barrier between him and wealth and position was down.

But he triumphed too soon. At the last minute came news that the funeral had been postponed. Something close to panic swept over Marston. What did it mean? Had something gone wrong? He must find out—and at once.

(Now read on.)

Suspicions.

WITH quick strides, Paul Marston turned his steps in the direction of the Hall. As he walked up the drive he was passed by slowly moving cars purring quietly towards the gates. In front of the house several sombrely dressed ladies and gentlemen were walking slowly up and down.

The front door was open, and, doffing his hat, Marston walked into the wide and spacious hallway. A few of the mourners were gathered there, but, ignoring them, Marston accosted the first servant he saw.

"I would like to speak to Miss Harvey, please," he said. "Do you know where I can find her?"

"I think she's upstairs, sir," said the girl. "I'll see!"

She departed, and a few moments later Paul Marston saw Joan Harvey coming down the staircase towards him. Marston studied her closely as she approached, noting the deathly pallor of her face.

"Joan, may I speak to you outside?" he asked in a low, quick voice.

"Yes," said the girl quietly.

They walked out on to the lawn which fronted the house.

"Joan, I've just heard the funeral's been postponed," said Marston. "What on earth's wrong?"

The girl made a visible effort to control her voice. Then:

"It's—it's been found that father died of poison," she said unsteadily.

Poison!

The fateful word rang like a knell in the black and guilty heart of Paul Marston. For a moment he was silent whilst he fought to keep a grip on himself. Then, in tones which appeared to voice only shocked astonishment, he exclaimed:

"But I don't understand, Joan. Didn't Dr. Wardler say your father died of heart failure?"

"Yes, but apparently Dr. Wardler was mistaken," replied the girl in a low, sad voice. "Sir Trevor Humphries, who is a Harley Street specialist and one of daddy's closest friends, says daddy died of some virulent poison."

"Was Sir Trevor Humphries called in to examine your father after—after death?" asked Marston unsteadily.

"No; he only arrived from London this morning for the funeral," answered the girl. "He wanted to look on the face of his old friend for the last time, so—so the lid of the coffin hadn't been fastened down. The moment he looked at daddy he—he called another friend of ours, Dr. Cranbrook, of Newcastle, into the bed-room. They were alone in the bed-room for some time, then—then Sir Trevor asked to see me alone. He told me as gently as he could that the funeral would have to be postponed, because both he and Dr. Cranbrook were certain daddy didn't die of heart failure, but of some virulent poison."

"But how did they know?" burst out Marston.

"By daddy's face, Sir Trevor said," replied the girl. "By some contortion of the facial muscles. Sir Trevor says there'll have to be an autopsy."

Paul Marston was silent, the fingers of cold dread clutching at his heart. What cursed, damnable luck this was, he thought furiously. At the eleventh hour—at practically the very moment before the lid of the coffin had been fastened down and his victim consigned to the black abyss of the grave—the truth had been discovered.

Paul Marston had only one thought in his mind now. He wanted to get away, to be somewhere alone where he could think and carefully ponder his own position in view of this grim and totally unexpected discovery.

But first he had a part to play, that of a loving and sympathetic suitor for the girl's hand. He steeled himself to go through the next few moments.

It was quite evident to Paul Marston that the fact that her father had taken an indigestion tablet after lunch that fateful day hadn't yet occurred to the girl. But it certainly would occur to her when the official inquiry which would follow the autopsy was fully launched.

She would be pressed to recollect every little incident of that meal. So would the servants; and Paul Marston was quite convinced that it was only a matter of time before the fact would come to light that Colonel Harvey had taken an indigestion tablet immediately before his fatal collapse.

"Well, Joan, I won't keep you any longer," said Marston gently. "I've taken up too much of your time as it is, I'm afraid. You know, don't you, that if there is anything at all I can do to help, you have only to let me know?"

"Yes, Paul, I know that," answered the girl in a low voice.

"Good-bye, then, darling," said Marston. "I will see you again as soon as ever I may."

He pressed her slim fingers in his, looking into her eyes with only deep sympathy and understanding in his. Then, releasing her hand, he turned away and walked quickly down the drive.

The Visitor.

IT was in a black and brooding frame of mind that Paul Marston drove back to Starkridge. Look at it as he would, however, he could see nothing in the discovery that Colonel Harvey had died of poison to cause him even the slightest alarm.

Carefully, and step by step, he went over the murder which he had so cunningly planned and carried out.

In the first place, he had bought the indigestion tablets in a shop in Newcastle where he was completely unknown. The tablets were a popular and well-known brand, and dozens of bottles—hundreds, maybe—must be sold in the course of a day. Consequently, it would be practically impossible for the purchase of such a bottle to be traced to him.

On his arrival home from Newcastle he had destroyed the tablets in the kitchen fire with the exception of the tablet in which he had placed the deadly cyanide poison. The bottle he had thrown into a stream swollen with winter rains.

So far so good. The possession of a bottle of indigestion tablets similar to those used by Colonel Harvey could never be traced to him. Paul Marston was absolutely convinced of that.

It was under cover of a black and moonless night that he had ridden warily across country to Haggerstaw. He had met no one, nor had he been seen by anyone. Again Paul Marston was absolutely certain of that.

His stealthy and nocturnal entry into the colonel's study had never even been suspected, let alone discovered. If it had been, the news would quickly have got round that someone had broken into the Hall.

Furthermore, he had taken the precaution of wearing gloves. His finger-prints would not be found on the bottle and its screw cap, if ever the bottle came to be examined for finger-prints.

Yet, apart from that, how many must have handled that bottle? There was the colonel, the domestic who dusted the study—possibly even Joan herself.

Then, when all was said and done, reflected Marston, take the day when the colonel had died. The man was seated at his luncheon with Joan. He, Paul Marston, was several miles away at Starkridge. And the colonel had died swiftly and tragically there at the luncheon table. How in the name of all that was wonderful and fantastic could he, Paul Marston, have had anything to do with the man's death?

Nothing—absolutely nothing at all. No matter if the autopsy and official inquiry caused foul play to be suspected, not the slightest breath of suspicion could ever be directed against him, Paul Marston.

It was, as he had told himself repeatedly, the perfect crime. He had absolutely nothing to worry about, and now that he'd gone over the whole thing coolly and calculatingly, he could see that more clearly than ever.

Relieved of the dread which had gripped at his heart when he had first heard that the real cause of the colonel's death had been discovered, Paul Marston arrived back at Starkridge his normal, composed self.

He told Betty the news, and she said:

"Poison, eh? D'you think he took it himself on purpose?"

"No, I should think he'd be the last man in the world to do that," replied Marston. "It must have been in something he'd eaten. Colonel Harvey had no reason to commit suicide."

The following evening Paul Marston received a letter from Joan. It read as follows:

"Haggerstaw Hall.

"Dear Paul,—Forgive me if I do not write much, but the autopsy was held this morning, and I know you will be anxious to learn the result.

"It has been found that daddy died of cyanide poisoning—enough to kill a dozen men, the doctors say.

"It is still an absolute mystery to me how he could possibly have taken the poison as the doctors say he must have taken it at lunch, and, as you know, I had the same to eat as he had.

"I have remembered, however, that daddy took his usual indigestion tablet after lunch, and have told Sir Trevor Humphries this. Sir Trevor has taken possession of the bottle, and is going to have the other tablets analysed, and is also communicating with the makers of the tablets.

"He says, however, that he doesn't think daddy can possibly have been poisoned by the tablet, as they are made by such a well-known and reputable firm.

"There is to be an inquest here to-morrow morning, and the interment is in the afternoon. I must close now, dear Paul

"With all my love,

"JOAN."

Paul Marston would dearly have liked to attend the inquest, but as there was no invitation for him to do so, he thought it better to keep out of the way.

He drove over to Haggerstaw for the funeral in the afternoon, however, and learned in the village that the inquest had been adjourned pending further inquiries.

He was present in the crowded little church for the simple service which preceded the interment, and he was amongst those who followed the coffin towards the graveside.

He kept in the background, not wishing to intrude amongst the relatives and intimate friends of the man whom he had so cold-bloodedly murdered.

He found himself standing beside a grave with a simple headstone. He glanced idly at the inscription carved on the stone. Next instant he quickly averted his head. For the inscription read:

"IN MEMORY
OF
HILDA THOMSON."

That was all, except for the date of death, but callous villain that Paul Marston was, he could not repress a shudder. For here he stood, by the grave of one of his victims whilst the body of yet another was being lowered to its last resting-place.

Paul Marston moved away. Leaving the little cemetery when the interment was over, he sought his gig and drove back to Starkridge. He would have liked to have called at the Hall, but he knew none of Joan's relatives and intimate family friends, nor was he yet the girl's formally accepted suitor.

That night Paul Marston wrote to Joan. It was a tender, loving little note, and he sent it over by hand the next morning, telling the farm lad who took the letter to bring back a newspaper.

As Marston had expected, the newspaper contained a detailed account of the previous day's inquest.

A representative of the firm who manufactured the tablets had been called. He denied emphatically that poison in any shape or form could have found its way into a tablet in the course of manufacture. This was borne out by the evidence of another witness—a Government inspector who periodically visited the laboratories of the company.

At this point the coroner had adjourned the inquest to enable the police to make further inquiries.

The police, eh? thought Marston, with an inward chuckle, as he read the report again that night in the kitchen. Well, the police would discover nothing. The whole affair would remain a baffling mystery for all time unless, of course, it was assumed that for some obscure reason the gallant colonel had committed suicide.

A sudden, quiet knock at the door caused Marston to raise his head inquiringly. In response to the knock Betty opened the door. As she did so, Marston rose swiftly to his feet, his surprise clearly written on his face.

For standing out there on the threshold was Joan Harvey.

"Why, Joan, this is a surprise!" cried Marston, throwing aside his newspaper and advancing with outstretched hands.

He was closely scanning the girl's face, wondering if this unexpected visit meant some new development in the inquiry into her father's death.

But there was nothing in the girl's face to render him uneasy. She was smiling, and looked infinitely more her usual self than she had done since her father's death.

"I hope I'm not intruding," she said, allowing Marston to take her slim gloved hands in his. "I was out in the car, and thought I'd call in."

"I'm jolly glad you have!" cried Marston, with an almost boyish fervour.

She moved to the kitchen fire, drawing off her gloves and spreading out her hands to the warmth. Betty glanced at Marston, smiled, then quietly withdrew from the kitchen, closing the door behind her.

"By Jove, but it's grand to see you again, Joan!" exclaimed Marston, joining the girl by the fire. "I never expected you'd drop in on me like this!"

"I felt I would like a talk with you," said the girl softly. "And I wanted to get away from the Hall for a while and get some fresh air. That's why I took the car out for a run. I've scarcely been out since—since daddy died."

"I've just been reading about the inquest," said Marston quietly. "Are there any fresh developments? I mean, have they any idea yet as to where the poison could come from?"

"No," replied the girl, shaking her head. "It's an absolute mystery. That's why they're calling in Scotland Yard."

At last Paul Marston is going to find himself up against Scotland Yard! Will his cleverness deceive them? Don't miss next week's developments!



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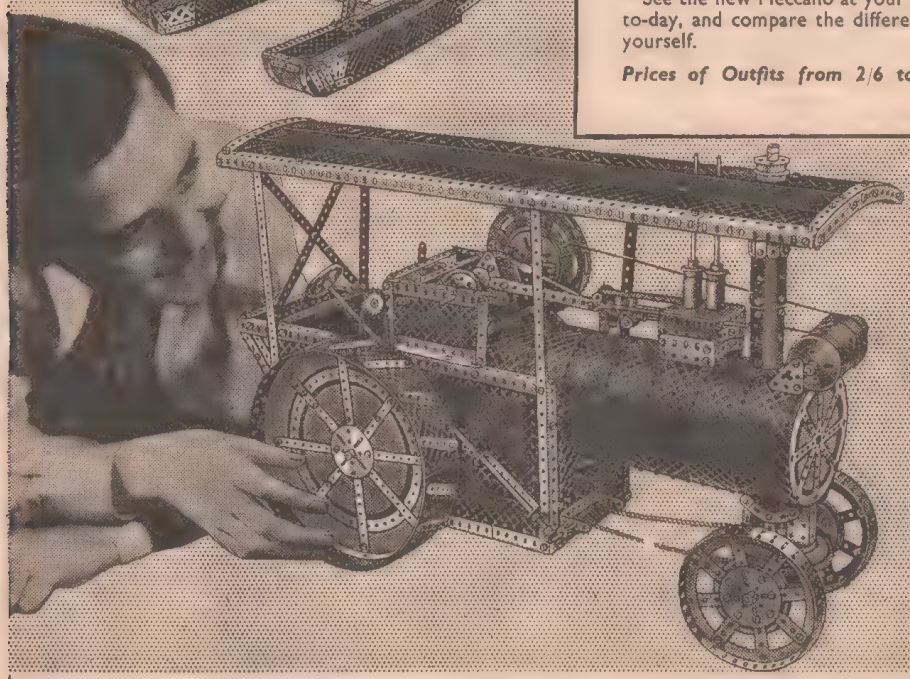
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THE MYSTERY OF SENOR 'Z.'

(Continued from page 12.)

the girl's hurrying figure. She glanced back over her shoulder, and Hulbert Peterson gave an excited shout.

"The maid!" he panted. "The maid at Skarr Hall who was in with Tallon!"

Already the girl had vanished round the corner at the end of the terrace. They turned the corner a few moments later in time to see the ruby rear-light of a taxicab disappearing up the street.

Another taxi, crawling along the opposite kerb in search of a fare, came swinging across the road towards them in response to a shout from Coutts. Peterson, the Yard man, and Sexton Blake entered it while still moving.

"Follow that taxi in front!" rapped out Blake. "It's worth a fiver to you!"

At the House of Torres.

"OF course she heard us all the time we were up there," said Blake, peering ahead through the glass. The taxi in front was travelling rapidly in the dark, glistening street. "But, with luck, she doesn't realise we are following her now!"

"And, with luck, she will lead us straight to Dearth Tallon!" nodded Coutts, with satisfaction.

The taxi ahead shortly swung right, then right again. Presently they found themselves passing down Park Lane. At Hyde Park Corner the other taxi cut down towards Victoria Station and Westminster, with their own driver hanging fifty yards or so behind.

The rain had evidently set in for the night, streaming down from a pitch-dark sky, dimming the street lamps. It was a cause of satisfaction to Sexton Blake; for at Victoria the vehicle they were trailing turned southwards, leading them a little over the river, apparently heading for one of the southern suburbs. If the chase led them to empty suburban roads the fast-falling rain would act as a screen for them to some extent.

"Where the devil is she taking us?" muttered Coutts, as they passed through the yellow glare of the Brixton High Road and on towards Brixton Hill.

"Lord knows!" growled Peterson.

They were heading now towards Streatham. No doubt it was only a coincidence that their quarry was leading them to the district where the house of Luiz Torres was situated, Peterson told himself; but it was something of a shock when, by Streatham Hill Station, the leading taxi swung left into the road that led to the higher end of Streatham Common.

"She can't be going to Mr. Torres' place, I suppose?" said Coutts.

Both he and Sexton Blake knew where Torres lived.

"That's impossible," answered Peterson sharply.

The front taxi emerged at last into the road skirting the dark common. Their own taxi was less than a hundred yards behind. They turned after the first—in the direction of Torres' house.

Not until their quarry came to a standstill by the big gates of the Chestnuts did Peterson really credit that the girl whom they knew as Marie Saunders could actually have been driving to that house. In utter bewilderment he saw—peering through the wet glass—the girl jump quickly out, thrust her fare hastily into her driver's hand, and vanish through the shadowy gates.

"Well, I'll be——" he began thickly.

He was frightened. He could not conceive what this utterly unexpected turn of events could mean—and the unknown was dangerous.

The first taxi was moving off as they leapt out. Coutts shouted to the driver, who braked in astonishment.

"I am a police officer!" rasped Coutts. "You are to wait!"

He pounded after Blake and Peterson.

Within the gates, Blake dragged out an electric torch and flashed it ahead up the drive.

They hurried on. Lighted windows appeared through the trees, and an electric lamp set in the porch cast a pool of light over the circular gravelled space before the front door. But there was no sign of the girl.

"She hasn't gone to the house!" muttered Coutts.

"Look here, I don't understand this——" began Peterson savagely.

"Hallo——"

It was Blake who had cut in on Peterson's words. His raking torch had lit up something lying some yards ahead of them, at the edge of the drive. He moved quickly towards it, the others at his heels.

A huddled human shape lay under the dripping branches of one of the over-arching trees. Coutts drew in his breath with a sharp hissing sound.

"Good lord!" he breathed. "What the devil's happened to her?"

"It isn't the girl——"

Blake had reached the shapeless heap before the others. He stooped swiftly and pulled the figure over on to its back. The torchlight flamed into a face that all recognised; that of a man none of them had seen since their presence in Cornwall, at Skarr Hall.

It was Detective-Inspector Tawnish, of the Cornwall county police—and he was dead.

Something was clutched in his fingers—a scrap of rain-sodden paper. A pencil was lying by him, and it was clear that in dying he had scribbled something just before the end. With difficulty Sexton Blake detached the paper from the dead man's hand.

Scrawled upon it was a single cipher:

"Z."

Trapped.

THE dripping rain pattered dully round them as they stood staring down at the dead man.

The manner of his death was plain enough. His stomach was drenched with blood, and a round bullet-hole in the clothing was visible in the torchlight.

Blake bent down and covered the peaceful face.

"He's warm," he said steadily. "Not been shot long."

"My heavens!" muttered Coutts. His face was white. "What does this mean, Blake?"

Blake was examining again the wet square of paper in his hand. It was an old envelope, addressed to Tawnish at an address in Cornwall. The big, wavering "Z" scored black upon it stared out from the white paper—weird, enigmatical.

"What's it mean?" muttered the Yard man again hoarsely.

Peterson shook his head dumbly. The big man seemed utterly amazed and horror-stricken.

"What about the girl?" jerked out Coutts.

"Forget her! She can't have known about this; she was only here a few seconds ahead of us! Anyway, she was simply making fools of us—I see that now! She saw we were following and led us here as a blind! She must know Torres lives here, of course. And by now, it's a safe bet, she's got out of the gardens by another way—laughing at us!"

"I'll go and tell Torres——" began Peterson thickly, moving abruptly towards the house.

There was a quick, heavy step behind them. Glancing round, Blake saw the figure of a uniformed constable hurrying up the drive. He had been passing on his beat, and the taxi-drivers, waiting wonderingly at the end of the drive, had told him that "something rum" was going on.

"Very man we want!" grunted Coutts.

He went forward to meet the constable, tersely explained, and gave instructions.

"Right, sir!"

Peterson was already on the steps that led up to the front door. Blake and Coutts reached him as the door was opened by a black-eyed young Argentine servant.

Peterson addressed him in rapid Spanish, and the young South American's face went startled. Before he could answer a door at the back of the hall had opened, and a tall, muscular figure in evening dress stepped into view. It was Torres, a thin cigarette in his fingers, his handsome face staring across towards the open front door.

At sight of Peterson, Coutts, and Sexton Blake entering, rain-soaked, past the servant, Torres seemed to stiffen queerly.

Before Peterson could speak Blake stepped forward towards Torres.

"A police officer has been found shot dead in your drive. Inspector Tawnish, who was in charge of the Cornish end of the Glass murder case."

An incredulous ejaculation broke from the lips of the Argentine.

"Dead?" he cried. "Shot? Inspector Tawnish? Yes, I remember him, of course. But——"

"Did he come to visit you, Mr. Torres?" interrupted Coutts.

The Argentine shook his head.

"He did not come to the house. If he was in the drive, presumably he intended to visit me." He stared from face to face; from Coutts' rugged countenance to the quietly watchful face of Sexton Blake, from Blake to the brutal-mouthed Peterson. "But—this is staggering news! Why should he have been coming here?"

"Can't make it out," said Coutts curtly. "Can't have been an official visit. Tawnish wouldn't be working outside his own area, of course. But he certainly didn't get in touch with me, saying he would be in London, as you'd have expected if he came up over the Glass murder case. Can't understand it at all."

A telephone stood on a bureau by the wall. Coutts turned towards it.

"I want to borrow your telephone, please, to phone through to the local station and the Yard, and I'd like to put through a long-distance call to Cornwall so that——"

"It is most unfortunate!" exclaimed the Argentine, breaking in with an apologetic gesture. "But the telephone is out of order! I have complained to the exchange, but they have failed as yet to send an engineer along."

"Out of order?" Coutts glanced at him queerly. "H'm! That certainly is unfortunate."

"Well?" growled Peterson. "What now?"

"I'll send the constable to telephone from the nearest call-box. Meanwhile, I'd just like to take a look round with Mr. Blake, Mr. Torres."

"Of course," murmured the Argentine smoothly. "I only trust you will be able to throw some light on this terrible mystery! Do you think——" For a moment or two he seemed to hesitate. "Do you think this tragedy to-night can be in any way connected with that other dreadful business—the murder of my poor friend Glass?"

"Shouldn't be at all surprised," grunted Coutts a trifle dryly.

He turned to the front door. The servant opened it, and the Yard man and Blake went out into the dark garden, where the rain hissed softly, leaving Torres and Peterson staring after them.

The police constable was standing near the body of the murdered detective. Coutts instructed the man to go to the nearest call-box and telephone to his station. The uniformed figure, with glistening cape, disappeared through the gates into the road.

Blake was making another examination of the body.

"He was shot about fifteen minutes ago, I should say, Coutts." He flashed his torch under the trees. "Here's the way he came!"

On the wet earth under the dripping trees could be seen the footprints left by the dead man before he had stumbled into the drive and collapsed where he now lay. The nature of the footprints showed how he had been staggering, all but falling at every other step. Here and there a dark splash of blood on the earth could be seen.

"He was making for the gates, I suppose," muttered Coutts; and Blake nodded.

"Looks as if his trail won't be hard to follow. If we find out where he was shot it may tell us a lot," said Blake. A harsh note had crept into his voice.

He stepped into the darkness of the trees, the light of the electric torch picking out the churned footprints of the ill-fated Inspector Tawnish. Coutts followed, also with a torch in his hand.

The trail led them out at the farther side of the belt of trees lining the drive, on to a soaked lawn. A spot of blood glistened crimson in the grass, as they went slowly towards the shrubbery from which the footprints—vaguer now—emerged.

The trail was leading them away from the house.

"It beats me what Tawnish was doing here," muttered Coutts, as they forced their way through the wet shrubbery. "He'd no business in this area, even if he was following up the Glass murder case——"

"Look!" breathed Blake.

They had come out at the far side of the shrubbery. A dim path lay beyond, and the fallen blood left by the staggering man who had passed that way not long before, could be seen plainly in the torchlight—and the trail led at a sharp angle towards the house.

They went silently along the path. It curved away towards the rear of the house, and after a while they found themselves skirting the damp house-wall. The grim trail that spattered the path was not hard to follow.

They came at last to a large rockery that was banked against the wall, and Blake halted, playing the light of his torch over the earth and creeper-covered stones.

The blood-trail ran up over the wet stones.

"I fancy this is where Tawnish got what they gave him," rasped Blake.

The two torches wavered over the dark rockery. At one end of it a number of the big stones were loose amid trampled earth. Behind it, a narrow window, spanned by iron bars, stared down at them blankly.

For a minute or more Sexton Blake examined the footprints under the window in silence.

"Tawnish was talking to somebody through the bars." Blake's eyes were on the window. "Talking to somebody in the house—though Heaven knows whom! Someone came round the corner of the house and surprised him. There was a struggle, and Tawnish knocked his man out pretty well, and turned to bolt. You can see where the other man went down; a big man, judging from the marks he left. But he wasn't too badly knocked out to use a gun; and that's what happened—he pulled a gun, as he lay there, and shot Tawnish. Got him in the stomach."

He pointed to some marks at the edge of the rockery.

"That's where Tawnish was when the bullet hit. He staggered, and clutched the wall. Then set off along the path, poor devil! Must have known his number was up, and wanted to get away with his story. He found his way to the drive, along the route we followed, and he'd hurt his man too badly for the man that shot him to go after him. Tawnish collapsed on the drive, and died—after writing that letter 'Z' on the envelope he'd taken

from his pocket. Either he hoped to be able to write more—an explanation—or he was wandering in his mind, and that 'Z' was what filled his thoughts."

They had been talking in low, scarcely audible voices, close under the high wall of the house. Now they turned and moved back along the path, towards the front of the house.

The door was standing open when they reached it, and outlined against the light within the big hall was the slim, elegant figure of Torres, the Argentine. He caught sight of their shadowy figures, and peered towards them through the rain.

"When you have completed your—er—investigations, gentlemen, perhaps you would like some coffee," he suggested. "Real Brazilian coffee, made in South American fashion. The best in the world!"

"It sounds very attractive," murmured Sexton Blake, pausing at the foot of the steps. "For the moment, however——"

Something hard came nosing between his shoulders.

Sexton Blake raised his arms slowly. He had recognised that hard-pressed object as the muzzle of some kind of a gun.

At his side, Coutts gave a sharp, astonished ejaculation. Neither he nor Blake had heard the two men who had stolen up behind them, bare-footed, noiseless as shadows.

"I think you will come in!" The soft, silky voice of Luiz Torres had hardened. His eyes were derisive as he surveyed them from the head of the steps. "At once!"

Side by side Sexton Blake and Coutts moved up the steps. To have refused they knew would have been suicide.

"So you show your hand at last, Mr. Torres," said Blake evenly, as he entered the hall, hands raised, limping as he went.

The door closed behind them. In the big hall a deathly silence followed Blake's laconic query, broken only by the swish of rain against the windows.

Blake and Coutts were standing with raised arms a few yards within the closed doorway, behind them the two bare-footed men with rifles hovering against their spines. Torres faced them with a thin, mocking smile, drawing silently at his cigarette.

There was a thick ejaculation from Detective-Inspector Coutts. And then he laughed harshly.

"You fool!" he said contemptuously. "Don't you realise the local police will be here at any moment? They've been phoned for——"

"I think not!" purred Torres. "I think not!"

And he was right.

The police constable whom Coutts had dispatched to telephone to the local station, lay huddled and motionless on the floor of a call-box a quarter of a mile away. A bullet-hole in the glass told how he had died. At that moment the dark form of his murderer was bending over him, and a hand which bore a glittering emerald ring was searching beneath the dead constable's cape.

Swiftly in the gloom the killer sought for and found what he sought—the murdered policeman's notebook. It contained the addresses, he knew, of two taxi-drivers who had driven himself, with Sexton Blake and Coutts and the girl he knew as Marie Saunders to the house of Luiz Torres that night; and Hulbert Peterson wanted those addresses.

. . . . .

"TAXI-DRIVERS SHOT BY GUNMEN!

"AMAZING LONDON MURDER MYSTERY!

"Two mysterious and brutal crimes, with the victim in each case a London taxicab driver, occurred during the small hours of this morning," said the "Daily Record" beneath splash headlines. "The victims are: William Arthur Blackett, aged 43, of 5, Wallace Park Avenue, Brixton; and Evan Thomas, aged 30, of 57, Hailsdon Road, Battersea. Both men were shot dead by unknown assailants who visited their respective residences, so far as can be ascertained, within a few minutes of one another, the crimes occurring in the neighbourhood of half-past three this morning. No motive has yet been discovered for either of these cold-blooded killings."

Tinker laid down the newspaper without reading further. Rising from the breakfast-table, he lit a cigarette and crossed to the window, staring down frowningly into Baker Street.

Where was Sexton Blake?

Tinker knew that he had gone to the Yard the night before, and had expected his return by midnight. Blake had failed to arrive, and he had not telephoned. Now, on the following morning there was still no news, and Tinker had enjoyed a solitary breakfast.

It was not a particularly rare thing for Sexton Blake—or Tinker himself, for that matter—to be away unexpectedly for a considerably longer period when working on a case. Normally Tinker would not have felt particularly anxious. But in some queer, instinctive way he was feeling vaguely uneasy.

Turning from the window he went into the study and crossed to the telephone, putting through a call to Scotland Yard.

But Coutts, it appeared, was not at the Yard. Tinker replaced the receiver.

He returned to the room where Mrs. Bardell, Blake's efficient housekeeper, was clearing away the breakfast things. He picked up the morning newspaper once again, and again his eyes fell on the glaring headlines that told of the grim mystery of the murdered taxicab drivers.

The last thought in Tinker's mind was that those cold-blooded murders, whose motive was so peculiar a problem, could in any way be connected with the cause of his present vague anxiety—the non-appearance of Sexton Blake.

He turned the pages of the newspaper restlessly. A grimly laconic announcement in the Stop-Press paragraph caught his eyes:

"Police-constable found shot dead in telephone-booth at Streatham, S.W."

He tossed the paper aside.

By midday Blake had still failed to put in an appearance at Baker Street. And a further telephone call to the Yard at lunch-time, brought the information that nothing was known there of the whereabouts of Detective-Inspector Coutts, and that inquiries were being made concerning him.

Tinker ate his lonely lunch with a very thoughtful shadow in his eyes.

Southward Bound.

A LIGHT mist was hanging on the grey, flat water as the Plaza Mayo headed down Channel past the white cliffs between Eastbourne and Newhaven, southward bound.

The pilot had been dropped some time before, by Dungeness. On the bridge Captain Seebohm stood by the wheelhouse with the third mate, his stocky figure well wrapped up against the damp chill of the Channel air, his hard-bitten mahogany face, with its keen, steady eyes and iron-grey hair staring ahead across the misty waters. The third mate was smoking a cigarette—a lanky, fair-haired youngster, enjoying his first trip as mate.

It was midday. Eight bells rang out from the wheelhouse, where a South American sailor was taking his trick at the wheel. There was a scraping of boots on the companionway that led up on to the bridge, and the second mate appeared to take over from the third—a stout, swarthy Argentine. The third mate vanished down the ladder and presently Captain Seebohm followed him, making for the saloon

The steward was there, bringing in dinner—a stout, jovial-faced, middle-aged man. The sight of him reminded Seebohm of that other steward he had signed on, the man with the rattlesnake eyes, who had turned out to be a crook of some kind whom Sexton Blake had "wanted." He had not properly got the hang of that queer affair even now—Torres had told him nothing. But Captain Seebohm realised there had been something odd about it. It had all helped to deepen his suspicion that there was something mysterious afoot somewhere in connection with the ship.

"Where's Mr.—what's-his-name—Vinaroz?" he asked the steward. "Dr. Vinaroz," he corrected himself.

"In his cabin, sir. With the—the gentleman, sir."

Seebohm nodded and went into his cabin.

He did not like passengers. But two passengers were travelling on board the Plaza Mayo by Torres' orders, a type of passenger that Seebohm relished as little as he could have done—an Argentine doctor named Vinaroz, with a patient in his care. The patient was said to have suffered a nervous breakdown; but the little the captain had seen of him seemed to indicate that he was a definite mental case—a dazed-looking, haggard, grey-haired man with peculiar eyes. His name, Torres had told him, was Forrest.

A doctor by himself might have been useful; but a doctor with an attendant lunatic was altogether another matter. He was glad that neither the doctor nor his patient would be taking meals in the saloon with himself and the officers.

By midnight the Plaza Mayo was down by the St. Catherine light—would soon be changing course. A light spatter of rain was falling, and the sky was heavily overcast. The weather-glass in the chart-room was falling. It had been falling gradually all day, and the face of Captain Seebohm was grim as he emerged from the chart-room, a stumpy briar between his teeth, and stood staring up at the sky. A heavy swell was running, and the ship lurched drunkenly as her newly painted bows plunged onwards.

Eight bells—midnight—had been struck, and the second officer was back on the bridge for his watch. He watched the skipper enter the wheelhouse with an unfriendly eye. He had taken a dislike to Seebohm.

He turned suddenly

Someone was mounting the companion-ladder behind him. He peered through the gloom, and saw a lean, wolfish figure step quickly on to the bridge.

"Who is that?" he rasped sharply.

Two pale, savage eyes glimmered down at him through the darkness

"Not a sound from you, or I'll send your soul to perdition!" whispered a voice that somehow sent the blood running cold in the Argentine's veins.

And he saw that there was an ugly-looking automatic in the stranger's hand.

"Get into the wheelhouse, son!" muttered the lean figure. "And not a sound, I tell you——"

The wheelhouse door was closed against the chill night wind. With fumbling fingers the dazedly astonished man pushed it open and stepped into the dark interior. He could feel the ice-cold kiss of the automatic caressing his fleshy neck.

The man at the wheel glanced towards him as he entered. He was a powerfully built seaman, wearing a blue cloth cap drawn down over his weather-beaten face—a face illuminated, as he stood at his post, by the pale yellow glow that rose from the illuminated dial of the big compass before him, the only light within the wheelhouse.

Dearth Tallon closed and fastened the door behind him. The opposite door, he noticed with satisfaction, was also shut.

"Captain Seebohm," he said softly.

Seebohm started and swung round, peering. Neither he nor the man at the wheel had noticed that the mate had not entered alone.

"Who's that?" ejaculated Seebohm, startled.

He took a step towards him, peering through the gloom, completely bewildered. Then he came to a standstill with a choking sound, for the light of an electric torch had ripped the darkness, directed down upon a hand—a hand whose lean, muscular fingers held a dull, blue-black automatic directed unwaveringly towards him.

Almost instantly the torchlight was snapped out. He heard a grim laugh as he stood as if turned to stone.

"You see that I have a gun, Captain Seebohm." The voice from the other side of the dark wheelhouse was hard. "I have two, as a matter of interest, at the moment—one in each hand."

"Who are you?" the captain choked.

The second mate had been edging as far away as possible from the man with the guns. He was in a cold sweat of terror, breathless, dumb. The man at the wheel was gaping, stupefied. For some moments there was no sound—nothing but the throb of the ship's engines, and the faint hiss of waves churning past the Plaza Mayo's lurching stem.

"Who am I?" Tallon's voice came from the darkness. "Never mind who I am, Captain Seebohm. All you have to know is that from now onwards I am in charge of this ship!"

CAPTAIN SEEBOHM stood gazing at Tallon in the gloom like a man in a dream.

"Didn't you know you had a stowaway on board, skipper?" grinned Tallon. "You ought to be glad—thundering glad. I'm the best friend you ever struck, if you only knew it!" He clicked his guns together in the darkness. "These two tools are fitted with silencers. No one'll hear, if I choose to shoot. And I shall choose to shoot, by thunder, if you try to leave this wheelhouse, or to raise the alarm—or to try any funny business! That goes for all three of you. Understand?"

"Are you mad?" asked Seebohm hoarsely.

"No. Sane. Saner than you, Seebohm—or you'd

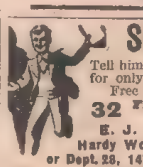
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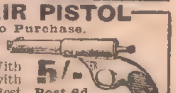


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never have let them get you where you are to-night, on board this coffin-ship of theirs! You knew she was rotten, plumb rotten. But even you didn't know just how rotten! You'd never have got her to B. A. No man could! And you were never intended to, you poor fool——"

There was a chill ferocity in Tallon's voice that sent Seebohm recoiling to the wall.

"But I'm in charge of this ship now! I'm master of her to-night! You're going to change her course, man. I'm telling you. You'll steer as I say——"

"He's crazy!" burst out the second mate, and began to chatter incoherent Spanish—prayers to the saints, they seemed to be.

The man at the wheel was still clutching the wooden spokes, gaping dumbly. He could see Tallon dimly, a shadowy figure with two guns glimmering in his hands, levelled towards the group of men by the wheel. Tallon's eyes fastened on the seaman.

"What's your course?" he grated.

The man was too bewildered to answer. Tallon took a step forward, glancing at the lighted compass.

"Steer nor'-nor'-west!" he ordered grimly.

There was a choking cry from Seebohm. He knew what the order meant.

"No!" he panted thickly. "By Heaven, I'm captain on this ship, and I'm going to do my job! I don't know who you are, or why you're doing this, curse you, but you shan't wreck this ship——"

"You obstinate fool!" snarled Tallon. "I'm saving you and every man on board, and you know it!"

He swung towards the man at the wheel.

"You heard my order! Do it!"

The man was frightened; but he dared not act against his captain, despite the guns in Tallon's hands. For a moment Tallon waited. Then, stepping swiftly forward, he smashed one of his guns butt-ended on the seaman's head.

The man collapsed soundlessly, and Tallon gripped the big, brass-mounted wheel.

He had slipped one of the guns into his pocket. The other he held levelled at Seebohm and the quaking second mate as he spun the wheel with his free hand. Slowly the Plaza Mayo swung round, lurching to the swell.

"If you shout, the odds are against anyone hearing you," Tallon told the two staring men. "And I'll swear I'll give you an ounce of lead that'll surprise you. You wouldn't shout again—unless it was for a nurse, in hospital——"

He spun the wheel back, and the Plaza Mayo steadied on her new course, almost at right angles to her previous line.

"Nor'-nor'-west, Seebohm!" he grinned. "It'll be due north in a while! Oh, I don't need a chart! I know this patch of the Channel like a book. We'll be on the Merlin Sands before long, where many a good ship has been smashed to bits."

"You can't do it!" panted Seebohm hoarsely.

"I am doing it!" came the sardonic answer. And the gun, levelled above the big, wooden wheel, covered him implacably.

The Plaza Mayo was driving steadily on. A flurry of rain pattered against the glass windows of the wheelhouse, and through the glass Tallon could see the grey, heaving waters running across their bows. Far away shore lights twinkled elusively, away to the right

"Not long now, Seebohm!"

Tallon peered forward. They were near the great sandbanks now—the famous sands that, once they got grip upon a ship, held it until the end, until wind and wave had smashed the vessel to a shattered wreck. He could see the foaming breakers, white through the gloom.

And then he caught sight of two tiny, swaying lights, away on the port bow. Two green lights, one above the other; he gave a mutter of satisfaction.

"Back, Seebohm!" he said fiercely, as the captain of the Plaza Mayo took a stumbling stride towards him. "By Heaven, I don't want to damage you, man——"

"You devil!" choked the old sea-captain.

He hurled himself at the wheel, his powerful hands grasping it, striving to wrench it round. Then Tallon's fist landed in his mouth, and he went reeling back with broken lips. His head struck the wall as he fell, and he was unconscious as he slumped to the boards.

The wheel was running free. Tallon seized it and spun it swiftly. The Plaza Mayo had been turning off her course; now she came swinging slowly round again, on towards the hissing breakers that lay ahead like seething milk.

"A coffin-ship for someone——"

Tallon was remembering Hulbert Peterson's words, overheard at the Bayswater flat through the listening-tube in the wall, as the big ship reeled on towards the breakers.

One of those men now on board, he knew, was a man whom Peterson had planned to be rid of for evermore. Who was it? But that was a question he had no means of answering.

The line of breakers at the edge of the great sandbanks was very near now—a hissing line of leaping foam. Beyond, half a mile away, the dark strip of coast, with its twinkling lights, was dimly visible. But Tallon's eyes were on the two swaying, green lights that were circling towards the ship.

The Plaza Mayo swept on like a charging monster. The roar of the breakers met her, and with a strange shudder she took the sands. For a moment she seemed to lift, in a helpless, heaving struggle to be free, then sank down heavily, scraping deeply into the clutching sands that held her, her screw foaming madly at her stern, the breakers pounding her dark sides.

The frightened mate saw the figure at the wheel smile strangely in the gloom.

"So long, son!"

Tallon strode swiftly to the door and out on to the bridge, slamming the door behind him. He ran down the companion-ladder to the door of the saloon.

He could hear shouts from the engine-room hatch. A hefty greaser appeared on the deck, and raced to the side. In a few moments the whole ship would be aware of the disaster, and Dearth Tallon was not waiting. He went down a second companion-ladder to the fore well-deck. Fifty yards from the ship a launch was heading for the side of the Plaza Mayo through the foam, a launch whose mast carried two green lights, one above the other.

Though there was enough depth of water on the sands to enable a launch to pass across them, the waves made it impossible for it to draw alongside. Tallon peeled off his coat and kicked off his shoes. With his flash-lamp he sent a flickering signal to the launch, and saw it swing towards the spot where he stood, sweeping down on the fast ebb-tide.

Tallon dived.

The icy chill of the water numbed him for the moment as he rose to the surface and attempted to strike out. The launch was fairly near, but there was still a wide stretch of lashing waves between it and him. Then he found his strength, striking out steadily for the plunging boat. In a few minutes he was on board, eyes glimmering amusedly into the faces of the two figures in the launch.

"Nice work, Sonia!" he muttered. "Nice work, son!"

Sonia March and Flack said nothing. Flack was wrapping a heavy rug round his master, while the girl at the helm of the launch turned it for the distant shore.

As they out swiftly over the smoothly heaving waters beyond the line of breakers, Tallon turned his head, staring back at the doomed ship.

"They'll never get her off. Not with this ebb-tide. And it's nearly high, too. Next high tide she'll be sucked tight. Well, they'll have all the time in the world to make their getaway before she smashes up——"

He broke off sharply.

A figure had come leaping from the high bridge-deck into the seething breakers.

"Good lord!" he ejaculated impatiently. "Some panic-stricken fool! He'll drown unless we pick him up!"

Sonia March had also seen the man jump. She pushed over the helm, and the launch swung round, heading back towards the stranded vessel.

Flack pointed.

"There he is," he said huskily.

A head could be seen among the waves, the head of a feebly swimming man.

That he would have drowned in another few moments was clear as they dragged him on board, a limp, dazed figure with wildly staring eyes. Again the launch turned, as Sonia swung it once more for the distant line of land.

"What did you want to jump for, you fool?" snarled Tallon. "There's hours of time for you all——"

He had flashed a torch into the man's face. The haggard countenance stared up at him with trembling lips.

"I wanted to get away," he answered. His voice was like that of a man talking in a trance. "To get away——"

He was not a sailor, it was clear.

"Who are you?" breathed Tallon. He gripped the limp figure lying across the varnished thwart by the shoulder. His eyes were gleaming. "Who are you?"

"I don't know," came the amazing answer. "They called me 'Z'—'Senor Z.'"

— —

In the Underground Room.

"SENOR Z!" breathed Tallon, and glanced at Flack. Flack's lizard face was fastened on the man they had just pulled aboard, with a black glitter in his beady eyes. "Hear that, son?"

Flack nodded.

"It's the man I heard Torres talkin' of, captain," he whispered. "That time I told you about, on the ship——"

"Put something round him," muttered Tallon. "Gosh, what a prize!"

Something on Z's wrist caught his attention. The man had fallen into a kind of stupor, and he made no movement as Tallon leant forward and dragged up a sleeve.

The bared arm was scarred in innumerable places by tiny punctures.

"The devils!" he whispered. "They've been keeping him chock-full of drugs for lord knows how long. Drugs that have eaten away his mind. But maybe we can pull him round. If we can, he can tell us things, I'll lay, that no other man in the world can tell us, about Conrad Flaxman!"

The speeding launch arrived presently at the mouth of an inlet. They slid noiselessly between the lonely wooded banks, and after a while the launch nosed into a dark, rotting wharf. Beyond it the shape of an old house could be seen, huddled among overhanging trees.

The house was one of Dearth Tallon's several convenient retreats; though he usually lived in town, he had a number of such retreats dotted here and there about the country, for "professional" reasons.

Half an hour later, with both Tallon and the drug-rotted man from the Plaza Mayo in dry clothes again, a dark, closed car drew away from the house overlooking the derelict wharf and took the London road.

Lying silent between Tallon and Sonia March, as Flack handled the big car, Z stared listlessly at his shrunken hands, clutching and unclutching on his knees, his wandering mind far away in the dark land of drugged imaginings. Tears were rolling slowly down his cheeks.

"Cheer up, son!" urged Tallon. "You're all right now! We'll see to you!"

"Who am I?" The monotonous question formed faintly on the trembling lips.

"By Heaven," muttered Tallon, "that's what I want to know!"

. . . . . .

Mr. Hulbert Peterson flung down the newspaper he had been reading, with an oath.

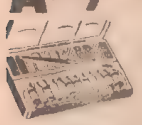
It contained a sensational account of the loss of the Plaza Mayo on the Merlin Sands, at the hands of a mysterious unknown man whom the newspaper described as "an armed stowaway, presumably a lunatic," who had taken charge of the wheelhouse and steered the ship to her doom. Already a storm which had arisen in the Channel was smashing up the stranded ship, after the captain and crew had got ashore in the ship's boats.

"Curse him!" said Peterson violently. "Curse him!"

He fastened greenish eyes on Luiz Torres, standing by the fireplace—an immaculate figure. The two were in Torres' study at the house overlooking Streatham Common.

"Curse him!" snarled Peterson again. "Oh, it

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was Tallon all right! He knew! And he's got Z——"

"We don't know he has," objected Torres, frowning.

"I tell you, it's sure enough. Seebohm says he's pretty certain he saw them get him into the launch. There's not an outside chance that he was drowned."

Peterson rose to his feet, his big figure towering, menacing, as he glared at the Argentine.

"We've got to get Tallon," he said with an unexpected quietness.

Torres shook his head uneasily.

"I advise letting him well alone," he jerked out. "We're sailing for Buenos Aires very soon. Once we're clear of this country we needn't worry about Dearth Tallon."

"Well, maybe you're right there," growled Peterson. He strode restlessly across the carpet. "After all, Tallon won't get much out of Z for some time. He's just a walking drug-shop!" He grinned brutally. "He can't tell anything."

"That's what I think," nodded Torres. "Besides, we don't know where to find Tallon."

Peterson looked at his watch.

"I want to have a word with our prisoners, Luiz."

"Very well."

Torres crossed to the door and led the way across the hall to a green baize door beyond an archway. It opened into a narrow passage, at the end of which Torres pushed open another door, revealing a wooden stairway descending steeply into darkness. He switched on a light, and led the way down into a stone-flagged passage that ran beneath the one above. There were light switches by the foot of the stairs, and he snapped them down, flooding the passage with electric light.

Various doors opened from either side of the passage. It was outside one of those at the farther end that Torres halted, thrusting back a well-oiled bolt.

He thrust the heavy door wide.

"Good-evening, gentlemen!" he said silkily.

The room beyond was furnished as an ordinary living-room, with rugs strewn over the stone floor. A fire was burning in the grate, and it was well lit by electric light. There was no window, but a narrow ventilation shaft pierced one corner of the ceiling. The remains of a meal lay on the table in the centre of the room, a meal for two men. An open door in one wall gave a glimpse of a second room that opened from this first, where two narrow beds stood.

Sexton Blake and Detective-Inspector Coutts were seated by the table.

Secured to an ankle of each was a thick steel chain, to the other end of which a heavy iron ball was riveted. It was possible for them to move at will about their prison, but only by carrying the big iron ball to which either was chained, a task calling for a man's full strength. So impeded, even to have attempted escape would have been utterly impracticable.

Blake was looking worn and ill, thanks to the almost constant pain in his wounded leg. Coutts sat glaring at the two men in the doorway with baleful eyes.

"Good-evening, gentlemen!" repeated Torres jibingly. His eyes flickered, strangely malevolent. "One regrets forcing upon two such energetic gentlemen as yourselves this no doubt irksome inactivity."

"Do you think you are going to get away with it?" rasped Coutts.

"Yes," said Peterson, with sardonic cheerfulness. "Why not?"

He and Torres had stepped into the room, leaving the door open behind them. Peterson's hand was on the gun that nestled in his side-pocket.

Blake saw it, and smiled.

"Not nervous, surely, Mr. Peterson?"

"I want a word with you, Blake," growled Peterson.

"This seems an excellent opportunity," agreed Blake dryly.

Peterson thrust out his jaw truculently as he glared down at Sexton Blake.

"You are going to tell me how it was, back at Skarr Hall, you got the notion it was a man named Flaxman—Conrad Flaxman—that did that Glass killing! Out with it, curse you!"

Blake smiled and shrugged, the chain attached to his ankle, securing him to the heavy ball of iron at his feet, clinking metallically as he moved his leg.

"It was quite simple. The simplest deduction!"

"Well?" demanded Peterson.

For a moment or two Blake did not speak. His eyes did not leave Peterson's face, and Coutts, watching, saw a look in Blake's cool countenance that told him Sexton Blake had some new idea at the back of his mind.

"Well," repeated Peterson menacingly, "you are going to tell me, Blake, if you value your health——"

"Certainly." Sexton Blake's voice was curiously gentle. "I will do better than explain how I recognised the murder of Siegfried Glass as the work of Conrad Flaxman, the crook who vanished ten years before in Buenos Aires. I will demonstrate my methods, Peterson, for your especial benefit. I want a sheet of paper first. You can oblige me?"

For a moment Peterson hesitated. Then, with a shrug of his powerful shoulders, he took from his pocket a sheet of paper—a ship-chandler's bill, Blake saw it to be.

"Well?" he rasped. He was impatient, curious.

"I want a wedge of paper for my little demonstration," went on Sexton Blake. "If you will fold up that bill of yours, I can give you a perfect demonstration of my particular methods." He was smiling dryly.

Coutts was watching with eager eyes as Peterson slowly folded up the oblong of paper. The Yard man saw that Blake had some definite motive in his request. Blake's smile was lingering oddly.

"Well?" rasped Peterson again, thrusting out the folded wedge of paper towards his prisoner.

"Thank you!" Blake took the folded bill and sat with his fingers running slowly over it. "You have just proved to me what I have long suspected, Peterson."

"What do you mean?" growled Peterson.

"I mean," answered Sexton Blake, "that you, as I have long suspected, are Conrad Flaxman. You—not Torres. You are Flaxman, the murderer of Siegfried Glass, as you have finally proved to me yourself so obligingly."

There was tense silence in the underground room, broken only by the soft flickering of the fire. Blake was smiling up into the suddenly glaring green eyes that stared down at him.

There was a startled ejaculation from Coutts. The Yard man was gripping the arms of his chair, tense and breathless. Luiz Torres was breathing quickly, and Peterson, glaring down into Blake's smiling, sardonic eyes, drew slowly back, almost as if in sudden fear.

"I see you do not deny it, Peterson," murmured Sexton Blake.

Peterson drew a hissing breath between his teeth.

For the moment he had been taken sheerly off his guard. Now a slow, hideous smile crept out upon his lips.

"You're a clever devil, Blake," he whispered. "Cleverer than I gave you credit for. I'll hand you that. Yes, I am Flaxman! You're a clever hound, Blake, but you're not as clever as I am! Because you are going to die quite shortly, and it isn't clever to be dead."

He laughed gratingly.

"Before I go back to Buenos Aires, you'll be stiff and cold—you and your Yard friend. I tell you, Blake, any man that sets himself to fight me signs his own death warrant——"

"That so, Flaxman?" broke in a laconic query from the doorway.

Flaxman swung round with an oath, cigar in hand. And from Luiz Torres there came a wild, shaking cry.

Lounging in the doorway, a black felt hat tilted down over pale, flickering eyes, hands thrust carelessly into his jacket pockets, was Dearth Tallon!

——

Cornered!

"YOU!" croaked Flaxman, with a husky oath, and grabbed for his gun.

Instantly two significant shapes bulged in Tallon's jacket pockets—a pair of levelled automatics, plainly discernible through the dark cloth.

"I shouldn't, Flaxman!" grinned Tallon warningly.

Flaxman's hand dropped empty to his side.

"You'd better stick 'em higher than that—quite high," advised Tallon, in laconic tones. "And that means you, too, Torres!"

Flaxman and Torres raised their arms. There was a tigerish glare in Flaxman's eyes.

Tallon laughed softly, and moved slowly forward into the room.

Sexton Blake and Coutts were watching dumbly, little less staggered than Flaxman and the Argentine. There was the rattle of a chain as Coutts rose suddenly to his feet. Tallon glared at them enigmatically.

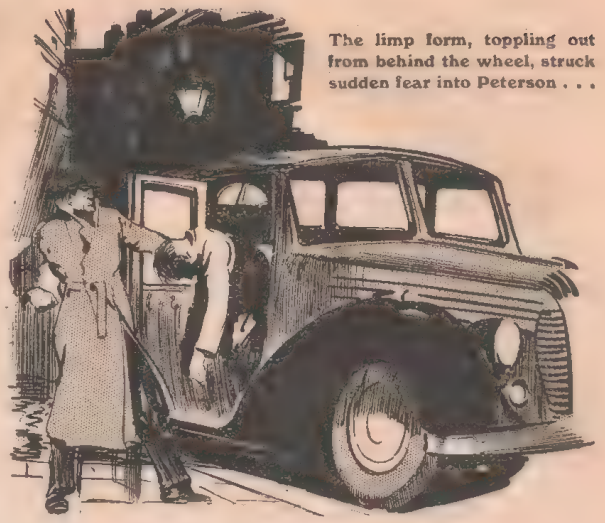
"Well, Blake? Well, inspector?" His voice was derisive. "I never thought of finding you! A two-man chain-gang—eh? Thanks for telling me that Peterson is really Flaxman, Blake."

Flaxman was breathing noisily.

"What have you against me?" he demanded, with sudden, bitter savagery.

For a moment Tallon did not answer. His lips tightened into a thin, crooked line, and the look that came into his eyes sent Flaxman a pace back against the wall.

"I'm glad to tell you, Flaxman!" Tallon's voice was grim as Fate. "Remember Raymond Hope? Of course you don't—he was only small game. You drove him to suicide, you and your crowd. Well, I'm Raymond Hope's brother; and my middle name is Vengeance!"



The limp form, toppling out from behind the wheel, struck sudden fear into Peterson . . .

The gun in his right-hand pocket seemed to thrust forward hungrily. Slowly he drew it out. The squat barrel glimmered dully in the light, levelled at Flaxman's heart.

The big figure of Conrad Flaxman cowered back against the wall.

"No!" he panted. The words seemed almost to rattle in his throat. "You can't kill me—not like this—not in cold blood——"

"Why not? You have killed men in cold blood, Flaxman. If it was good enough for them, by Heaven, why isn't it good enough for you? But I'm not ready for you yet. Listen, you two! I'll tell you why I really came here to-night. You're going to tell me something I want to know."

"What's that?" asked Torres, moistening dry lips.

"Who is Z?" Tallon's voice rang harshly in the heavy stillness of that underground room.

Torres shook his head dumbly. Flaxman's lips twisted into a grin.

"Yes, you'd like to know that!" he answered. "Well, find out—find out, curse you——"

He did not finish the jibing words. From somewhere above their heads, muffled by the intervening masonry, there had come to their ears the sound of a shot. It was followed almost instantly by a second.

Tallon backed towards the door. Running footsteps, faint shouts, came to their ears now. Tallon stepped swiftly into the passage, gazing towards the stairs.

Heavy footsteps were audible on the wooden staircase at the far end of the long, stone-floored passage. In another moment two figures came into view, and one of them Tallon recognised.

It was Tinker, an automatic in his hand. With him was a man whose cut told Tallon unmistakably that he was a plain-clothes man; behind them, a uniformed constable, with drawn truncheon, appeared.

Dearth Tallon had been the last man Tinker had expected to find in the house of Luiz Torres. But he had recognised Tallon instantly.

"We want that man!" he shouted eagerly, and broke into a run, the two policemen at his heels.

The three of them saw Tallon step swiftly back into the room from which he had just emerged—heard the door slam. When they reached it, it was fastened from within. The burly constable flung himself against it, and a bullet came tearing through the wood in answer, ripping Tinker's sleeve.

"Look out!" ejaculated the plain-clothes man hastily.

Tinker levelled his automatic at the door. But a sudden shout from within the room caused him to lower his gun.

The shout had been in the voice of Sexton Blake.

"It's the guv'nor!" Tinker cried. "So we were right——"

It had been the information laid by a taxi-driver named Booker that had put Tinker on the trail of his missing chief. The man had visited Baker Street in the hope of seeing Sexton Blake. The general public knew nothing of his disappearance, and that of Detective-Inspector Coutts, for news of it had not been communicated to the Press.

Booker, it appeared, had seen one of the mysteriously murdered taxi-drivers, Blackett and Thomas, late on the night of his death; and the man—it had been Blackett—had told him that he had driven three

men to Streatham that night, one of whom had proved to be a police officer, and another whom he believed to have been Sexton Bake.

Blackett had told Booker that he fancied there had been something "pretty queer" afoot at the house in Streatham. But it was not until a few days later that it had occurred to Booker that Sexton Blake was most probably unaware that one of the murdered taxi-drivers, whose cold-blooded slaughter had occurred the same night, had been the man who had driven him and his companions to the house in Streatham; and that possibly the information might help the authorities to elucidate the mystery of Blackett and Thomas' death.

That the house in Streatham to which Blackett had driven Blake and his companions, one of whom had clearly been Coutts, was the house of Luiz Torres, seemed almost certain. Tinker had communicated at once with Scotland Yard; with the result that in less than an hour a strong posse of police, mostly armed plain-clothes men, had arrived with Tinker at the Chestnuts.

On their unexpected arrival, one of Torres' Argentine gunmen, seeing that the game was up, had lost his head, and started the gun-play that had been heard in the underground room; a brief, savage gun battle that had ended with the capture of three of the Argentines, and the wounding of a constable and two plain-clothes men. The rest of the South American gunmen had made their escape by a secret way of retreat at the rear of the house, and the Chestnuts was now in police hands.

Crash!

Again the burly constable had flung his weight at the locked door. It scarcely shook.

"Whoever's in there with Mr. Blake, we've got 'em like rats in a drain!" muttered the plain-clothes man in grim triumph.

But the massive woodwork needed more than their weight to break it open. It was not until, some minutes later, an axe had been found and brought to the scene, that its destruction could be accomplished.

There was an anxious frown on Tinker's face as he watched one of the police who now crowded the passage, wielding the long axe.

A splintered gap appeared near the lock. Another crashing blow, and the door gave way, sagging open.

Lying on the floor by the table were two inert forms—Sexton Blake and Coutts, the heavy chains that secured the great iron balls to their legs gleaming dully in the electric light. The marks on their foreheads showed where each had been struck down by the butt of an automatic. And the motive became clear to Tinker as his eyes fell on the dark square opening of a raised trapdoor in the ceiling.

The trapdoor, they found, gave access to a narrow passage at the back of the house. A window in the passage was standing open.

None of the police watching in the dark gardens had seen them go. But Torres and Flaxman had vanished—and Dearth Tallon had vanished equally. And the night held no trace.

The Crook of Buenos Aires

THE famous Cafe Colon, in the city of Buenos Aires, stands on the Avenida de Mayo, the handsome, tree-lined avenue that runs from the Casa Rosa—the president's palace—to the spacious Plaza Congresso, where stands the white-domed Parliament House. It was here, in the Cafe Colon, with the lilting music of a ladies' orchestra rising softly above the murmur of the speeding traffic in the sunny Avenida, that Mr. Conrad Flaxman sat at two o'clock in the afternoon, drinking Quilmes beer.

His square Teutonic face, with its five neatly arranged duel-scars, bore an expression of calm complacency.

Flaxman had returned to the city that he had made the headquarters of his world-wide activities to find that his affairs there had been going exceedingly well under the direction of the man he had left in charge—Miguel Camajo, one of his most trusted lieutenants—a portly, middle-aged Argentine, whose criminal record was as sinister as his face was gentle and benign.

Conrad Flaxman was pleased with Miguel Camajo—and he was also pleased with himself.

He had put six thousand miles between himself and England; and that meant six thousand miles between himself and Scotland Yard and Sexton Blake and—Dearth Tallon.

Even the loss of Z could not harm him now, he was telling himself, as he set down his half-litre glass. And as for the Plaza Mayo—that ill-fated ship had been battered almost entirely to pieces by now on the Merlin Sands, without a doubt, and its hidden secret was already, presumably, lost for all time in the Channel ooze.

He paid the waiter, and left the cafe, hailing a taxicab.

"Calle Castillo!" he ordered.

"Calle Castillo?" The driver echoed the name doubtfully, evidently trying to place the street in question.

"En la Boca!"

"Ah——" The driver remembered. "Si, senor!"

Flaxman stepped in, and settled himself comfortably in the open back of the taxi, and lit a cigarette. He was borne rapidly away in the direction of the Casa Rosa. Two minutes later the vehicle swung right, speeding towards that section of the city known as the Boca—the slums of Buenos Aires.

It was not surprising that the taxi-driver had not instantly recalled the whereabouts of the Calle Castillo, for the street of that name in which he finally drew up was a narrow, out of the way, unevenly cobbled cul-de-sac. Between two shabby buildings at the open end of the cul-de-sac a glimpse of the wide yellow waters of the Rio Plata was visible, and the masts and funnels of shipping gathered in the docks.

By Flaxman's direction the taxicab had halted by a closed wooden gateway which bore the legend, in stained white paint:

"VALLADOLID Y CIA."

Flaxman entered the unpretentious premises of Valladolid & Co. by a glass-panelled door that gave entry to a narrow passage. A swarthy young Argentine seated at a small table in the passage, reading a Spanish humorous journal, glanced up swiftly at his entry, and jumped to his feet when he saw who the newcomer was.

"Buen' dias, senor!" he murmured obsequiously, and hurried to open a door on the right of the passage. Flaxman strode through, entering a long room where a couple of Argentine clerks were busy at typewriters, while in the main portion of the room beyond them half a dozen other men were at work—clerks and packers.

The business in which Valladolid & Co. engaged was that of bookbinding. It was a small firm, who never accepted large commissions, even if they were offered. The Senor Valladolid who had started the business had long since been bought out, though his name was still used. Conrad Flaxman owned Valladolid y Cia. utterly, the shares being divided between himself, Luiz Torres, and Miguel Camajo. Flaxman's share was ninety-five per cent.

A door to the right bore the name: "Sr. Miguel Camajo." Flaxman entered, and the stout Argentine seated at a desk within rose quickly.

Camajo was not alone. A sallow-faced, unhealthy looking man, with a close-cropped black beard in which streaks of grey were visible, was standing by the manager's desk. He vanished silently through the door at the appearance of Conrad Flaxman; and Flaxman saw that one shoulder was hunched unnaturally, and that he walked with a limp.

"Who the devil's that?" he asked.

"Goya?" Senor Camajo glanced at the closed door. "Francesco Goya—the brother of Ramon Goya—you remember him? He got into trouble with the police, did Ramon, while you were in Europe. Nothing to do with us. He was mixed up with some criminal gang, and the police got after him. He left for Rio—quickly!" He smiled and shrugged. "He sent his brother to take his place here. He is a pretty good man, his brother; clever with watermarks."

"Good! Make sure you keep him. We want clever men, and we can afford to pay them their price," said Flaxman complacently. "Well, I want to see the engravings of the new German notes."

They passed together into the long room where the men were working, and then to a private room where a carpet rolled aside revealed a trapdoor.

Soon afterwards, Conrad Flaxman left the building, and strode away in search of a taxi. He found one in the palm-shaded avenue behind the docks, and told the man to drive him to an address at the other side of the city.

Flaxman lived in a palatial house in the Plaza Santa Polonia, close by the magnificent Palermo Park—one of the prides of Buenos Aires. He lived there, with a large staff of servants, under the name of Kutz, a German alias that he had adopted when settling in Buenos Aires ten years before.

He paid the taxi-driver, and mounted the white steps to the front door; long glass double-doors, backed with the delicate tracery of an ornamental iron grille—a type of door common among the larger houses of Buenos Aires. He produced a key; but a manservant admitted him before he had inserted it, and Conrad Flaxman strode through into the magnificent marbled hall that was his pride.

He was handing his hat and stick to the manservant, when a shattering explosion roared out deafeningly behind him.

He felt a splinter of flying glass from the shivered door slash along his neck. He turned, staggering, and saw a cloud of blue-grey smoke drifting into the hall from the steps. The doors were torn open, the iron grille twisted and smashed.

That a bomb had been flung at the steps he realised already. And the sight of a speeding car vanishing across the sunlit plaza seemed to indicate whence the bomb had been thrown.

"Madre de Dios——"

The Argentine manservant had reeled back against one of the marble columns of the hall, dazed and frightened. Flaxman put a hand to his neck, and found that his fingers became sticky with blood.

He swore violently, and crossed a little unsteadily to the smashed doors. Something was lying on the torn stonework of the steps—something that had evidently been thrown there after the bomb had exploded—a small green leather case.

He snatched it up in bewildered uneasiness, opened it with quivering hands. It contained nothing but a visiting-card. But as he read the name upon it his lips twisted into a crooked, malignant line of terror and amaze.

"Tallon here!" his voice shook. "Dearth Tallon—here in Buenos Aires——"

Within the hour the house of Conrad Flaxman in the Plaza Santa Polonia was packed with gunmen—sleek, cigarette-smoking young Argentines, who lounged in hall and corridors.

Flaxman's Triumph.

SENOR MIGUEL CAMAJO—whose yearly rake-off from the activities of Valladolid y Cia would have made the salary of most of the world's Prime Ministers look foolish—sat in what he termed his second office, by the foot of the secret stairway that led down from the offices above to the hidden workshops, his genial countenance bent thoughtfully over the papers on his desk. Near him stood Francesco Goya, the man with the club-foot, whose skill in the matter of watermarks Miguel Camajo found so useful an asset.

"Yes, this is the better." Camajo spoke in Spanish, the Spanish of Argentina, which differs considerably in accent from that of the native Spaniard. "Undoubtedly this is the better, Goya. The watermark does not show so whitely. Repeat that—exactly."

"Si, senor."

The man with the club-foot picked up the specimens he had brought for Camajo's inspection, and turned with an air of satisfied pride to the glass door. As he did so a small green lamp set in the wall above Camajo's desk lit up—signal that someone was being admitted through the gunman-guarded trapdoor at the top of the stairs.

He rose and went to the door. His office was a partitioned-off corner of a long work-room, where a dozen men of varying types and nationalities were working at a large table, busy over drawing-boards; dark-skinned South Americans and Italians for the most part, with one or two fair-haired Germans and Swedes, and a couple of Englishmen. The foot of the stairs ran down close by the frosted-glass door of Camajo's little office, and Camajo emerged in time to see Goya sprawling on the floor, with Conrad Flaxman glaring down at him.

It was clear what had happened. Goya, limping by the foot of the stairs, had got in the way of his big employer, and Flaxman, in his hurry, had cannoned into the cripple, sending him sprawling.

"Hang you!" Flaxman stared down at the fallen man with vicious anger; he was in a dangerous temper. "Can't you get out of my way, you misshapen hound!"

The unhealthy ivory pallor of the man's face turned to a dull flush. He scrambled up, his eyes glittered queerly—his breathing suddenly audible. For a moment it looked as though he would strike his master. Instead, he made an ungainly bow.

"Gracias, senor!" he whispered. "A thousand apologies for my—my shape." The last word seemed to come from him with an effort. His eyes were on the ground as he turned and limped away.

"Cursed fool!" muttered Flaxman as he strode into Camajo's office.

"He is clever with watermarks," murmured Miguel Camajo gently. "With your permission, I want to raise his salary by two thousand pesos."

"As you like," nodded Flaxman, with a shrug. "I can rely on you in those matters, I know. Pay him well, if he is useful to us."

It was clear that he was agitated. Only with an effort did he seem able to concentrate upon the business he had come to discuss. It was less than twenty hours before that the bomb had been flung at the steps of his mansion in the Plaze Santa Polonia, and that he had found the visiting-card of Dearth Tallon lying amid the debris.

Not that Flaxman had any intention of informing Miguel Camajo of that incident. He left his manager, an hour or so later, puzzled as to the reason for his ugly mood, for "business" was good, and Conrad Flaxman, with millions of pesos pouring into his treasury, should have had no reason for anything but complacent satisfaction, in the opinion of Senor Camajo.

Flaxman passed through the trapdoor at the top of the stairs into the room where the four big-shouldered gunmen lounged, and made his way through to the street. He was not alone. Two other gunmen, of his personal bodyguard, had been waiting in the room above the stairs—men whom he had decided to take with him everywhere, until Dearth Tallon was that which Conrad Flaxman intended to make of him—a shattered corpse.

The silent bodyguard at his heels, "Herr Kutz" stepped out on to the dusty, sun-bathed sidewalk. His car was waiting by the kerb, a chauffeur at the wheel. For the time being, Flaxman was no longer trusting himself to taxicabs.

The cul-de-sac was deserted but for the waiting car. The man at the wheel did not move or glance round at the appearance of his master. Flaxman addressed him sharply. The figure of the chauffeur remained motionless, head sunk forward a little, as though he were dozing.

"Wake up, confound you!" ejaculated Flaxman violently, and then he started and peered at the silent seated figure. His face whitened.

He strode forward and gripped the man by the shoulder, shaking him. The chauffeur toppled side-

Continued on page 22.

HORNBY TRAINS



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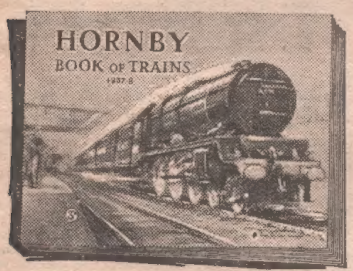
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(Continued from page 20.)

ways in his seat, and Conrad Flaxman recoiled, with a startled oath.

The man was unconscious, and a swift examination revealed the cause. Lying on the seat beside him was a pad of cotton-wool, the size of a man's fist, heavy with chloroform.

Not till then did something else catch Flaxman's eyes. Pasted to one of the windows of the car was what appeared at first glance to be a small oblong patch of greyish powder. He stared, and saw that it was a photograph

His mouth opened dumbly and his scarred face went weirdly yellow, for he saw what the photograph was.

His bodyguard were both busy lifting the chauffeur from his seat. They did not see their master standing swaying, with beads of perspiration creeping out upon his brow. But they heard the sudden crash of glass as Conrad Flaxman drove a raised fist through the car's window like a madman, shattering the pane to which that photograph had been pasted. He flung open the door of the car with a bleeding hand and snatched the mangled photographic print from the litter of glass within. Fragments of glass still clung to it as he thrust it into his pocket, cutting his hand afresh.

"Get him in!" he panted thickly. "Tell them to look after him! Then come——"

He was staring round with terror in his eyes. No sign of anyone; but he entered with the two gunmen as they carried the chloroformed chauffeur into the building, and did not emerge till they were with him.

"You will go in the car, senor?" muttered one of the bodyguard.

"No!"

Flaxman dared not now, for his very life, use that car, knowing that Dearth Tallon had been to it.

It was by taxicab that he set off to return from the Boca to Palermo, in company with his two guardians. They had asked no questions, and he had volunteered no information. He said no word as they sped westward along sun-drenched, palm-shaded avenues, but his face was working oddly.

That photograph that Siegfried Glass had held for blackmail, and which he had gone to such extreme measures to obtain—the photograph he had believed at last to be safely destroyed, lost for all time with the breaking-up of the Plaza Mayo on that Channel sandbank—in the possession of Dearth Tallon!

To Flaxman it seemed like some black magic, some superhuman power working implacably against him!

A breathless ejaculation burst from him in German. He was staring through a traffic-congested area near the north docks, at a figure walking at a brisk rate along the opposite pavement.

Leaning swiftly forward he shouted to the driver, and the taxicab came to an abrupt halt.

Flaxmen spoke swiftly to his two gunmen. In silent obedience to his directions, they jumped out. Flaxman ordered the taxi-driver to drive on.

A slow, triumphant smile crept out upon his lips. The darkly greenish eyes were blazing as he stepped out of the taxicab not long afterwards outside his house.

Workmen were repairing the broken steps and doors. He hurried past them into the house and up to his room. A telphone call to Luiz Torres was answered by Torres' valet, and he chafed impatiently at the brief delay, but in another minute his chief lieutenant was on the wire.

A quarter of an hour later the immaculate figure of Luiz Torres was entering the room. The servant who had ushered him upstairs closed the door, and Flaxman stood surveying his satellite with evil eyes.

"Am I sure?" he jerked out, in answer to Torres' first eager question. "Of course I am sure! And if those two succeed——"

He broke off, breathing hard.

"But they will succeed! They are good men, those two. They will succeed. And then I shall have Tallon in my hands—utterly in my hands!"

At six o'clock the workmen busy in front of the house left for the day. The new front doors were already fitted, the broken steps patched temporarily with boards. There was still no news of the two men who Flaxman had dispatched on his urgent errand from the taxicab, and he was frowning impatiently throughout the evening meal, to which Torres had stayed.

Dusk fell at last over the Plaza. Back in Flaxman's private room he and the Argentine waited restlessly.

"Think anything's wrong?" asked Torres dryly after a while.

"No," snarled Flaxman. "They'll come. They had to wait till it was dark, anyhow——"

"It's been dark an hour," pointed out Torres.

Flaxman swung round on him.

"Curse you! Why the devil can't you——"

His words snapped off. He had heard a motor-car drawing up opposite the house. He hurried to the window, jerking aside the curtain, peering down.

Torres heard his hissing breath of triumph.

"Yes, it is they. And—they have succeeded!"

The two gunmen whom he had last seen slipping from the taxicab had appeared on the wide staircase. They were carrying between them a long shapeless object, wrapped in a dark cloth. Without a word, they passed Flaxman and Torres, and bore their burden into the room.

"Good fellows—good fellows!" Flaxman's voice was an evil purr.

Torres followed him into the room, and the Argentine closed the door. The two swarthy gun-sharps laid their burden on a sofa by the wall. One of them made a grinning remark in Spanish, but Flaxman did not hear.

He strode to the sofa and dragged away the twisted cloth from the form lying there. A human form, writhing faintly, bound hand and foot and gagged, was revealed. The same figure that he had seen amid the crowd from his taxicab earlier that day.

Sonia March.

"THE beautiful friend of my dear friend, Mr. Dearth Tallon!" Flaxman stroked the girl's cheek, his every word dropping from his lips like treacle. "Welcome to my humble abode! And to think that until a few hours ago I thought you to be far away in England. I should have known that you would not desert our friend Mr. Tallon so readily."

He waited until the door had closed behind the two gunmen, then pulled Sonia's gag away.

"Tell me, how did Tallon know I had come to Buenos Aires?"

She looked up at him contemptuously.

"How did Blake know?" she countered unexpectedly.

"Blake!" He stared at her, not understanding. "Blake is in England——"

"You're wrong there!" She smiled mockingly. "I saw Sexton Blake myself last night in the Avenida de Mayo."

Flaxman seemed for a moment to sway where he stood. His green eyes glittered, snake-like; his breath became suddenly audible. Then he laughed.

"You're lying!" he snarled, and forced another laugh. "Of course, you're lying. A clever story, for the spur of the moment, but it gets you nowhere." He pulled himself together with an effort; even managed to regain his former suave geniality. "Now to the business in hand. You will be interested to know, of course, what my plans for you are."

"Something nasty, I imagine. What are they?"

"Well, that depends. That very much depends, my dear!" Flaxman was lighting a cigar, his big figure towering over her. "My plans now depend entirely upon Mr. Tallon."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this!" He watched a carefully formed smoke ring rise to the ceiling and break against it. "Either you or Tallon is going soon to die. The choice I shall leave entirely to Mr. Tallon. I shall offer him your freedom and safety on condition that he delivers himself unreservedly into my hands. It will be interesting—don't you agree?—to see what he will choose."

. . . . . .

It was less than an hour later that a dark closed car drew up in the Calle Castillo, opposite the entrance to the premises of Valladolid y Cia.

Flaxman, Torres, and a bodyguard of two men alighted from the chauffeur-driven car. The bodyguard carried into the building a limp form wrapped in black cloth, and the door of the offices closed behind them.

The Cordon of Death.

SEXTON BLAKE had discovered at Skarr Hall sufficient evidence in Leo Glass' notebook to put him on the trail of Conrad Flaxman. He had sailed for Buenos Aires in consequence of the knowledge he had gained from the code messages in Leo's writing, and in a fast boat that had arrived in the River Plate some time before Flaxman himself had reached B.A.

He had not made his presence in the city known to the Argentine police immediately, though he knew that Scotland Yard was in touch with them in connection with the Flaxman case. Blake was anxious to complete his own chain of evidence first; definitely to locate the "slush" factory that he had long known Flaxman to be running, and to be in a position to round up the whole personnel, if possible, before the authorities. Otherwise, there was the danger that the police, by an indiscreet move, might lose either Flaxman himself, or the majority of his satellites.

Blake was staying at a quiet, homely boarding-house in the Calle Talcahuano, kept by a large and motherly "senora," who had not the faintest idea that her newest guest was a man whose name was known even in far-distant Buenos Aires as the greatest English detective—the greatest detective in the world by general admission.

Blake had come to B.A. alone, leaving Tinker to work in England on the mystery of Z.

Blake knew that Z existed, but that was about all. That this nameless man had some important bearing on the case, and that to establish his identity would help in its final elucidation, seemed certain.

Where Z had disappeared to Tinker was working to discover—so far without success, as Blake knew. He and Tinker were in constant cable communication. But Tallon had left Z well hidden. He had left him in a lonely cottage in the Midlands, still sick and ill, the ghost of a man, without will-power or memory, in the efficient care of Flack.

That Tallon was in Buenos Aires Blake knew well enough. He knew also that Sonia March was there, for he had seen her actually a moment after she had seen him.

Sexton Blake, thoughtfully sipping a cup of black South American coffee in a quiet out-of-the-way cafe near his lodgings in the Calle Talcahuano, smiled grimly.

Blake had learnt a great deal since arriving at Buenos Aires. The extent of his knowledge would have staggered Conrad Flaxman. But in addition to the Flaxman affair, Blake had some old scores to settle with Dearth Tallon, and, the way things were shaping, it seemed to Sexton Blake that those old scores with Tallon would be settled, one way or another, before many more days had passed.

. . . . . .

"If D. T. seeks S. M., a visit to the Boca should lead to a satisfactory arrangement being arrived at between the parties concerned."

Conrad Flaxman, seated in his upstairs office at the premises of Valladolid y Cia, a thick cigar between his teeth, and a savage smile on his brutal lips, read the notice that had appeared, in English, in the evening newspapers of Buenos Aires that night, and gave a grunt of satisfaction as he laid the paper down. It was the evening following the capture of Sonia March.

"That'll bring him, Luiz—and to-night!"

Luiz Torres, who was standing near him, unsteadily drawing at a cigarette, a definite nervousness revealed in every line of his handsome aquiline face, surveyed the big, complacent figure of Flaxman frowningly.

"But will it?" he jerked out. "Will he be such a fool as to come here when it's obviously a trap?"

Flaxman nodded.

"Yes," he said smilingly. "He will walk into it with his eyes open—for the sake of the girl. I would swear to that. And when he comes"—he shrugged—"he will not leave again. Not alive, that is."

Flaxman rose to his feet, his huge, broad-shouldered figure towering in the tiny room.

"Come downstairs. We'll take a look at the girl."

He made his way towards the room where the hidden trapdoor was situated that led down to the subterranean workshops.

The employees who worked in the "open" premises, and in the secret factory beneath, had left the building at the end of their day's work an hour or so ago. But a solitary figure was still seated at one of the long tables in the first of the underground rooms when Flaxman and Torres descended from the trapdoor.

It was Goya.

"Why the devil haven't you gone, man?" demanded Flaxman angrily, halting beside him.

The pallid face of the cripple lifted.

"I wished to finish this particular task, senor."

"Get out!" ordered Flaxman. Then, remembering that it was wiser to placate so useful a workman, he dropped a hand in a friendly way on the shoulder of the malformed figure. "Yes, get along Goya! You're a good worker, and I don't want you to crack up by overwork. Understand?"

"Very well, senor."

Goya gathered up his working materials, and Flaxman and Torres passed on into one of the rooms beyond—a room where a number of small printing presses were installed. It was in a convenient store-room, opening from this apartment that Sonia March had been installed.

That a prisoner was being kept there, Flaxman's employees were now well aware. But they had shown no interest in the matter; they knew better than to betray any curiosity in their chief's affairs.

Flaxman produced a key, and unlocked a door set in the wall by the printing presses. Like all these subterranean rooms, the small room beyond was windowless, illuminated by electric light.

Sonia March was lying on a couch within. She was no longer bound, and she rose quickly. By her feet a tray standing on the floor contained the remains of a meal. She looked pale and ill. But the light of steady courage in her eyes did not falter as she faced the two men framed in the doorway.

Flaxman bowed mockingly in his stiff Teutonic manner.

"Well, my dear, you have been comfortable to-day, I trust? Senor Camajo has looked after you well, I hope?"

"Your solicitude for my comfort is quite touching," she answered, with cool irony; and, as before, her coolness amazed both Flaxman and Torres.

"I have brought you news that will perhaps interest you," grinned Flaxman brutally. "Arrangements have been made for your—your friend, Mr. Tallon to visit us to-night. I doubt, however, whether you will be able to see him—alive."

"Men have sought his death before, but he is still alive," she said breathlessly.

With a triumphant laugh, Flaxman stepped back from the doorway and slammed the door. He locked it and pocketed the key. In a mood of strange jocularity he slipped his arm through Torres' as they moved back towards the room beyond.

"This is my night of triumph, Luiz—my night of triumph! I don't mind telling you, Tallon unnerved me for a little. To-night I take my revenge. There are twelve guns waiting for him up there. It is possible he is already dead——"

He broke off with a choking ejaculation rattling incoherently in his throat.

The two men had passed through into the long room where they had found Goya at work on descending the stairs from the secret trapdoor. There was no sign of Goya now. Flaxman had ordered him to leave the building. But there was someone else.

A lean, wolfish figure was coming down the staircase at the far end of the room—the staircase that led down from the hidden trap. The figure of a man in a well-cut dark suit with a black felt hat drawn at an almost rakish angle across his eyes, his hands thrust deep into the side pockets of his jacket, a long, thin cigar held between his teeth. At the foot of the stairs he halted, looking across towards Flaxman and Luiz Torres, both staring back at him as though he were some spectral visitor from another world.

A deathly silence reigned, broken by the suddenly noisy breathing of Conrad Flaxman.

"I've come," said Dearth Tallon softly.

The Triumph of Goya.

"YOU!"

Flaxman's voice, at last coherent, was little more than a whisper.

Beside him Luiz Torres was still inarticulate, his face bathed in tiny points of sweat.

How Dearth Tallon had succeeded in penetrating the ranks of the murderous dozen, waiting for him above, was a problem that baffled, seemingly, any possibility of human understanding. There was only one entrance to the premises above—that where the gunmen had been posted. Yet he was here, standing before them, quietly knocking the ash from one of his favourite Manuelas.

"Wondering how I got in?" He had read their thoughts. "Nothing so very magical about it, Flaxman. I guessed some of your bright boys would be lying up for me, and when I got near this dump I kept my eyes on the job, and some of your gay young gun-sharps weren't so thundering well hidden as they flattered themselves. I saw them, and they didn't see me. Too bad, eh, Flaxman? So I did a little wall-climbing—found my way to the back of this dump from the next street. No doors there, so I got in by a window. Yes, it was barred. But those bars were easy to a saw, and I'd come ready."

He nodded up the stairs behind him.

Until then neither Flaxman nor Torres had noticed a huddled figure lying silent and still in the shadows at the top of the stairs immediately beneath the big trapdoor.

"Had to knock out the sweet young thing in the room that trap opens from. Got him before he could squawk a syllable, luckily; and I brought him down with me so the other sports won't find him and wonder what hit him. No, they'll just go on waiting for me up there. And they couldn't hear any squawks you raised. These floors we're under are thundering thick, I noticed."

Tallon laughed softly. And then in a moment his voice had changed. His teeth showed in a grin that turned Flaxman's blood cold.

"Well," he snarled malignantly, "where is she?"

He drew one hand from his pocket, and the hand held a large-calibred automatic.

There was a tense, waiting hush. It was broken by Flaxman's laugh.

"Well," he sneered, "why don't you shoot?" His voice rose to a high note of triumph. "Because you daren't! You were bluffing—trying to! You daren't shoot me, because you know that then you would never find the girl!"

He laughed exultantly.

"I've got you, Tallon, and you know it! If you want to save that girl of yours you'll have to accept my terms. Understand? My terms—not yours!"

Tallon grinned queerly.

"What are your terms, Flaxman?"

"Now you're talking sensibly!" Flaxman's voice was a sudden purr. "Put down that gun—surrender yourself to me—and I promise you the girl shall be sent safe to England by the next liner. The Alcantara sails next week."

"And I?" queried Tallon. "What happens to me?"

"That is a matter we should have to consider," grinned Flaxman. "But surely you don't put your safety before the safety of the beautiful Miss March?" he went on jibingly.

"And you really think I would trust you to see that girl safe?"

Tallon shrugged.

"My word of honour——"

"Your word of honour! I wouldn't swop your word of honour for a rat's."

"You will have to, I think!" Flaxman's teeth showed, big and white.

"I think not." Tallon's smile was equally ugly at that moment. "I anticipated this bargain, of course. I took steps to ensure that you keep your end of it."

He was moving slowly forward. He took from his pocket a small grey-tinted photograph, and tossed it on to the table between them.

It was the same photograph as that which Flaxman had found fastened to the window of his car, and at sight of it his colour changed.

"You recognise the picture, I see." Tallon's eyes had not left Flaxman's face. "You're wondering, I suppose, where I got the negative? I can tell you not only that, but the whole story of that photograph, Flaxman. The whole story, for to-day I had a cable from England. From that man of mine, Flack—you'll remember him!"

"What do you mean?" muttered Flaxman.

"I mean," answered Tallon, "that I know who Z is!"

"He is lying!" sneered Torres.

"Don't talk like a fool!" grinned Tallon. "I tell you, Flack cabled me to-day, telling me. Z, as you call him, even among yourselves, lest any accidental eavesdropper should learn the truth; Z, whose brain and mind you almost rotted away with your drugs, till even he no longer knew who he was—he has remembered now! Flack's been doctoring him back to health ever since we hauled him out of the sea water that night, and his memory has at last come back!"

Flaxman seemed about to speak, but his teeth snapped together. His green eyes glittered.

"Yes, I know the whole thing now," went on Tallon. "Z is the real Leo Glass!"

"I wonder if you can prove that?" put in Torres silkily.

"Sure it can be proved! The whole story. That photograph there got into the possession of Siegfried Glass—a photograph that alone, by its own self-evidence, could hang you, Flaxman! Glass, I say, had got it, and made you pay to keep it to himself. It was with him when, some while ago, he travelled to England on board the Plaza Mayo, getting a passage on a tramp hoping you would not know what ship he was travelling on. At the docks in England he discovered your crowd were lying up for him, Flaxman, to get him and the photograph when he came ashore. So he hid it in the ship, and you had to let him go when you found the photograph wasn't on him. You daren't touch Siegfried Glass till you had that photograph. In fact, you had to go on paying him hush-money——"

He smiled malignantly at the look in Flaxman's face.

"You didn't realise Glass had hidden the photograph on the ship—the Plaza Mayo. You thought he had most likely sent it to somewhere in England by post or messenger. You were at your wits' end to get hold of it. And then there came the matter of Glass' son. You happened to find out that Siegfried Glass was trying to find the whereabouts of the son whom his wife had taken away with her as a child when she deserted him. You discovered that Glass was on the track of the son who had been adopted by an English family in the Argentine after the death of Glass' wife in Buenos Aires. At last the identity of the son he had not seen for more than twenty years was established, and Glass sent for his son to come to England. You knew all this, and you hatched a very pretty plan!"

Tallon was enjoying the look in Flaxman's face.

"You managed to collar Leo Glass before he got to his father. And you planted a crooked young fool named Godfrey Pace on Siegried Glass as his son. It wasn't difficult in the circumstances, your idea being that once Siegfried Glass had made a will leaving everything to his son, he should be murdered and all his possessions inherited by your tool, the fake Leo. Yes, quite a pretty plan! Because you felt sure that somewhere among Siegfried's possessions you would find that photograph that had to be destroyed at any cost if you were to sleep 'snug o' nights.

"It worked all right to a point. You murdered Glass the night I was there, thinking, no doubt, that the murder could be planted on to me, as it so nearly was. But you didn't find the photograph—you and Torres and the fake Leo—even when you had the free run of the dead man's things. Instead, you only found a clue to its whereabouts. Glass had never been able to get that photograph back from Plaza Mayo, as it happened. I don't suppose he had really wanted to, for it was safe there. You bought the ship, then, to find it. And still you couldn't——"

He laughed softly.

"So you made that ship as unseaworthy as she could be, while still holding together at all, and ordered her to the Argentine, knowing she must go down in the first dirty weather she struck in mid-Atlantic. And you sent Z—the real Leo Glass—on her, to be rid of him as well as of that photograph that you knew to be on board. You would have murdered Z outright, only at that time you wanted to keep in with young Pace, the fake Leo; and you had promised Pace not to murder Z, because Pace was in terror that if you did, and the truth came out, the fact of his having stolen Leo Glass' name and inheritance would make it seem certain that he had abetted his murder, and that he would hang. It would all have worked pretty well, eh, Flaxman, if the Plaza Mayo hadn't run on to the Merlin Sands like that? And by a sweet bit of irony it was Z himself who chanced to find that photograph, and put it in my hands."

Again he laughed.

"And there is a copy of it. A close-up photograph of you, Flaxman, murdering a man in—so I believe—this very building. One of your workpeople whom you didn't trust, and thought best out of the way, I imagine. And it was probably an accident the photograph got taken at all; but you use cameras in this forgery racket of yours, of course, and there was one in the room at the time, and someone worked the shutter. By accident, I imagine; but the photograph was taken, and it got into the hands of Siegfried Glass. I suppose he was one of your employees then, but with that negative in his hands he was able to retire on a handsome pension that he forced you to hand over regularly. Isn't that the size of it?"

"You seem to know the devil of a lot!" sneered Torres.

"I do. Useful knowledge, too. It was from a Limehouse Chink, as a matter of fact, that I first got an inkling of it all. He'd got it from a drunken gunman who was in your pay, Flaxman, and who spilled the beans in a dope den down by the river, after having a considerable number over the eight. The Chink was a fellow I'd once done a good turn to, and he knew I was after one or two men for a private ache, and that one of them was named Flaxman.

"He told me all he knew—that Siegfried Glass, of Skarr Hall, in Cornwall, was swinging it on a lad named Flaxman by means of a photograph that he had got, and Flaxman daren't argue with. He was able to give me a cigarette-case that the gunman had lost in his den, which had been given him, he claimed, by Flaxman himself, after doing a job for him.

"There were finger-prints inside that case, and I was able to figure out which one was yours, Flaxman. The gunman's I was able to count out, because I was able to find out what his print was like. So there I was—with your finger-print and that photograph to look for. That's what took me that night to Skarr Hall, that photograph. And the finger-prints on that gold bowl the girl got from the house the same night told me definitely that the man I wanted was one of the men who had recently been handling that bowl. Not Glass himself, of course, and young 'Leo' was too young; so I knew that it was you or Torres, and I fancied you!"

Flaxman had been listening dumbly. He understood at long last the mystery of Tallon's ability to get upon his trail.

"But what I want to tell you about that photograph, Flaxman," went on Tallon, with a hard smile, "is where the negative of it is now."

"Where is it?" breathed Flaxman. "Tell me, curse you! You'd better, if ever you want that girl to go safe——"

"Before coming here I left it, in a sealed envelope, with the manager of one of the English banks, here in this city!" grinned Tallon. "My instructions were that unless a girl named Sonia March, whose minute description I provided, called for that envelope in person at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, it was to be handed—with the letter also enclosed in it—to the chief of police. So I think you will have to let her go, Flaxman, unless you want to sacrifice everything else, all your accursed wealth, to get out of B.A. before the time to-morrow morning when the police are searching for you, to hang for the murder shown in that photograph!"

He laughed, very softly.

(*Continued overleaf.*)



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"So what about it, Flaxman?"

A string of oaths fell like poison from Flaxman's glistening lips. With a sudden spring he leapt round the table, hands clawing for Tallon's throat.

There was no time for Tallon to use his gun. His clenched fist it was that rammed into Flaxman's face, and the big man staggered back, blood oozing from one of the staring eyes. There was a chair near him, and he snatched it up, flinging it with all his giant strength. It caught Tallon on the shoulder, and he reeled to the wall, and Flaxman came at him like a madman.

"Back!" rasped Tallon. His gun was levelled steadily.

Flaxman recoiled, panting thickly. And then a strange look that leapt into the other's eyes caused Tallon to swing round—too late.

The hard nose of a big Colt had come pressing into his back, against his spine, held in the hand of a man who had appeared from the door of one of the smaller rooms, behind him. Tallon stiffened; and with the menace of that steady pressure against his spine, he was powerless to resist as a hand came under his arm and snatched the automatic from his own hand.

The man behind him stepped back—a gun held now in either hand. Tallon, turning, saw a malformed figure with a club-foot and one shoulder hunched higher than the other; a man with a strangely pallid face, and a faint, twisted smile on the lightly bearded lips.

"Goya!" breathed Flaxman exultantly. "By Heaven, man, I thought you'd gone——"

His triumphant, gloating words died away in his throat. For one of the levelled weapons had swung towards Flaxman and Torres, with a threatening movement, while the other still covered Dearth Tallon.

"Goya!" panted Flaxman.

He was remembering vividly the jibing insult he had offered the man—regretting it as he had seldom regretted anything in his evil life.

So Goya had not forgotten—or forgiven! That was the dismaying thought that filled Flaxman's mind as he stared aghast at the quietly smiling figure. And Goya had heard all.

"Well, whose side are you on, son?" queried Tallon—cool, laconic, watchful.

"Neither!" came the answer. "I am the enemy of both!"

They knew the voice; knew, in a moment of staggering revelation, that Goya was Sexton Blake!

— — —

Backs to the Wall.

IT had not been difficult for Sexton Blake to gain the position of an employee in Flaxman's flash note factory, coming to Miguel Camajo—then in sole charge of "Valladolid y Cia"—with credentials that had seemed to prove him to be the brother of Ramon Goya, one of Camajo's most trusted men.

Having in the first place, thanks to the knowledge he had gained in England, been enabled to keep immediate watch over Flaxman's premises in the Boca, on his arrival ahead of Flaxman in Buenos Aires, he had seen Ramon Goya leaving the place, and had followed him.

By chance, Ramon Goya had been knocked down by a "hit-and-run" motor-car driver in a lonely street by the docks, and Blake had taken charge of him. Goya's delirious ravings had told him all he wanted to know to be able to pose as his brother, with a story that Ramon had had to fly from Buenos Aires owing to his activities in connection with the sinister crook gang; and a letter of Ramon's taken by Blake from his pockets had enabled him to imitate the man's writing closely enough to provide Miguel Camajo with letters written seemingly in Ramon's own hand.

The following day, Ramon Goya had died in hospital, and been buried without his identity being known to any but Sexton Blake. And Blake had taken up his duties as "Francesco Goya."

Now that he had revealed his identity by his natural voice, both Flaxman and Torres, surveying him with aghast eyes, could see the real man beneath the assumed exterior; but even so it was not easy to realise—and the look in Flaxman's eyes brought a grim smile to Blake's lips.

"Not a very pleasant surprise, eh, Flaxman?"

Flaxman's face had gone deathly white, its duel-scars glistening chalkily. Torres had clutched unsteadily at a chair. Blake glanced at Tallon.

"It was convenient to wait for you to walk into their trap. I wanted you, too. It was a convenient way of killing two birds with one stone. And your conversation has told me several things I have been most anxious to know. The girl is down here, by the way. She is safe. I have been watching over her most carefully, of course, though she did not know that. I am afraid, however, the police will want her, too, for the theft of that gold Quichua bowl, the property of Siegfried Glass——"

Tallon laughed harshly.

For the moment he had been taken completely off his balance by the discovery of the cripple's identity, even though he had known nothing of "Francesco Goya," and his amazement had therefore been less than that of Flaxman and Torres. But now Tallon was himself again—cool, laconic, savage-eyed.

"You're a clever devil, Blake. I'll hand you that, right now. I knew you were here in B.A., but——"

"Keep back!" rasped Blake grimly. Tallon was moving slowly towards him.

Tallon halted.

"You win, Blake! You've got Flaxman now—not me. And he'll hang, thanks to you, for his murders. But what about that girl? Hang it, Blake, can't you let her go?"

"I am sorry. I am afraid it is out of my power to do so. These premises are surrounded by police!"

There was a shaken cry from Torres. Flaxman still stood dumb, malignant, his flaming eyes burning strangely.

"Down here, of course, we can hear nothing," went on Sexton Blake. "But by now, I imagine, the gunmen upstairs have been taken by the vigilantes. A few days ago, while working 'overtime,' I rigged up a secret telephone through one of the ventilator shafts that lead up from here, and five minutes ago I was in communication with the police, whom I had arranged to be ready to surround this place to-night."

"Where is Sonia March?" jerked out Tallon.

"In a store-room opening from that room over there. You can go to her, if you like. The police will soon be here, in any case. You will find the key to her prison in Flaxman's pocket."

"Thanks a lot!" grinned Tallon.

His eyes flickered with a queer, unreadable light as he stood for a moment staring across at Sexton Blake. Then he swung towards Flaxman. Flaxman did not heed as Tallon took the key from his pocket.

"I'm sorry Blake got you, and not me," said Tallon thoughtfully, and moved towards the room Blake had indicated. He opened the door, revealing the row of printing presses there. In the doorway he turned.

"But there's one thing, Flaxman, your finish on the scaffold will settle my score for good—the score I told you about. Raymond Hope!"

Tallon vanished into the inner room. Torres had buried his face in his hands. Flaxman suddenly spoke.

"How did you get on to me, Blake, first?" he asked with surprising quietness. "I want to know that."

"At Skarr Hall. It was very simple. I found a wad of paper in the bed-room where Siegfried Glass was murdered. It had evidently been used to wedge a door, and it was folded in an unusual way. Most men folding a square or oblong sheet of paper fold it laterally. The wad I found was folded diagonally, corner to corner. I remembered that a certain crook was known to have that idiosyncrasy—the habit of invariably propping open the door of a room in which he was committing a crime, to render his getaway in an emergency easy and rapid, as many men do, and always using a paper wad for the purpose. But the great point was that this paper wad was folded diagonally, Flaxman, always. And I remembered that the man who did this was named Conrad Flaxman——"

Flaxman's eyes seemed almost to be protruding from his face. Blake smiled dryly.

"A small point that never occurred to you? But even the Yard knew it. A curious thing, the little slips such men as you invariably seem to make, Flaxman!"

Suddenly there was a sound from the top of the stairs.

The trapdoor was being dragged up, light from above flooding the shadows where the faintly stirring figure of the gunman lay. Men in blue uniforms, with black-gaitered legs—Argentine "vigilantes"—came quickly into view, with a number of plain clothes men behind them.

As Blake had prophesied, the police had rounded up the gunmen who had still been waiting for their intended victim—Dearth Tallon—in the premises above, ignorant of the fact that their quarry was already in the building, below their very feet! And half a minute later handcuffs had snapped on to the wrists of Flaxman and the trembling figure of Luiz Torres. And then——

A shattering roar, deafening in the confined space of the underground factory, echoed thunderously within the room ahead.

Blake raced towards the door, flung it open. A haze of white smoke came drifting out past him, hot and acrid, out of the darkness beyond.

"Madre de Dios——"

One of the vigilantes came racing to Blake's side, and sent the light of an electric torch tearing into the gloom. But it was not until the smoke and drifting particles had cleared a little that they understood.

A gaping hole was torn in the low ceiling of the room before them, with a great shower of powdered plaster drifting beneath, a white heap of it on the boards below.

The work of a small bomb that Tallon had used to smash a way through to the ground-floor level of the building—and had already vanished through, with Sonia March, hidden by the drifting flames and dust.

By the time they themselves arrived on the ground-floor, where Flaxman's gunmen were being watched over by a posse of armed vigilantes in one of the offices, it was too late. None of the police had seen anything of Tallon or the girl, although they had gone immediately in search of the explosion.

A swift scouring of the neighbouring parks and streets revealed no trace.

Dearth Tallon and the girl he had come to save from the hands of Conrad Flaxman had vanished into the sultry night of Buenos Aires, and the subsequent investigations in the subterranean factory revealed in due course that several thousand pounds' worth of perfectly made "stush" notes had vanished with them, for there had been a number of cases containing forged Bank of England notes in the room where the printing presses stood; and it was never Dearth Tallon's habit to waste his time, even when with his back to the wall

* * * * * * *

On the whole Blake was satisfied with the case. He had got Flaxman and Torres, the two leaders, and though he had not got Tallon and his lovely partner, he was not altogether displeased. It meant that in the future he would run against that astute but not unpleasant crook again. And that prospect suited Blake.

Back in England, Godfrey Page, alias Leo Glass, was arrested and convicted for his imposture, though he received only a light sentence. He had thought that by going to the police and asking for protection he was throwing dust in their eyes. But on his arrest he soon broke completely down and confessed all he knew.

As to the real Leo Glass, he has completely recovered, and already the horror through which he passed is beginning to fade from his memory.

THE END.

FOR NEXT WEEK!



What Was the Thing in the Drive?

For a moment they saw it in the car's headlights—a grotesque, stumbling figure in cape and high-crowned hat. Then it was gone without trace—without a single footprint in the snow. A weird welcome to Cloon Castle for Chief Inspector "Grouser" Beeke and Eustace Cavendish of the Yard; and ahead—grimmer, more fantastic riddles still. Murder—and the uncanny secret of the Death Room; the mystery of the vanishing body; the terrifying discovery in the vault. And behind this screen of mystery and fear, Beeke knew, some clever, ruthless plan was working out. Someone in that Christmas party at Cloon Castle was the killer—but who? And for what black motive?

See how Grouser Beeke clears it up—brilliantly, unexpectedly—in next Thursday's fine complete story, "THE FANTASTIC AFFAIR AT CLOON CASTLE!" Edwy Searles Brooks wrote it—and even "D.W." cannot claim to have given you a more thrilling and mystifying Christmas yarn! Make certain of it!

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